commonweal

The Editors
NERVE GAS, ANYONE?
EL SALVADOR

ONE DOLLAR

NOVEMBER 7, 1980

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By the waters of Disneyland

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Studs Terkel American Dreams

Reviewed by: Leonard Swidler, Saul Maloff, Richard Wightman Fox, Sanford Pinsker, Richard Kuczkowski

Rediscovering Sigrid Undset

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Correspondence

Novak & Reagan

Bethesda, Md.

To the Editors: I have known Michael Novak for at least a decade. His rambling and strained endorsement of the former governor of California [Oct. 24] is perhaps one of the most startling revelations of a person's metamorphosis I have ever witnessed.

Without a clear and consistent philosophy linking those steps in his rather short journey—from one of Eugene McCarthy's "kids" to court theologian of the neoconservative phenomenon—Mr. Novak revels in name-dropping, non-sequiturs, and what appears to be a magnificat of political sycophancy as he searches for a temporary home. . . .

In my view Novak rejects the very pluralism to which he had been converted (a "born-again ethnic," a mutual acquaintance says of Novak) as well as the groups to whom he had offered himself as spokesperson. . . .

Novak has revealed himself as a member of the "new class" which he professes to abhor—the unelected, self-anointed, self-righteous commentators, hopping from one position to the next and constantly promising never to err again. .

This endorsement completes the circle. The tiger has swallowed its tail. Some of us in dialogue with Novak for at least a decade are not surprised. Novak can be selectively outraged by President Carter and selectively mesmerized by the actor/candidate. It makes sense. Members of the "new class" can do that easily when it suits them.

President Carter has a solid list of accomplishments. We all know that he has not achieved all the goals he enunciated during his first presidential campaign. But one needs only to mention his efforts and positions on energy, education, environmental concerns, women's rights, minority affirmative action, the family, human rights, the Mideast and peace, the social justice programs, and others. President Carter has stayed firm in the face of an increasingly reactionary tide which has sucked in the weak-hearted.

In an imperfect world we have had peace with dignity for the last four years. . . . In my neighborhood when you have to tell people you are strong, you are really weak.

Strength is more than armaments. It means the ability to change and compromise and conciliate without selling our souls to the demon of unharnessed nuclear power or irresponsible corporate power. To charge President Carter with appeasement toward the Soviet Union is irresponsible and just not true.

I have heard the old standbys, work, family, neighborhood, strength, and liberty, so many times before. Agnew and Wallace tried to rally the American electorate around those trigger words, but so did Jack and Bobby Kennedy. Remember?

Bon voyage, gentle Mr. Novak. You can always come back to the old neighborhood.

PAUL J. ASCIOLLA

Markets & economists

Bryn Mawr, Pa.

To the Editors: In response to the two letters criticizing my July 4 article on "The New Conservative Economics":

Thomas Sowell [Sept. 12] objects to my treatment of, in his words, "conservative economics." My article deals with the *neoconservative economics* of the past decade or so—a point made unmistakably clear by repeated references to "the new conservatives" throughout the text, as well as in the title and subtitle (twice!) and on the cover of the July 4 issue.

Professor Sowell, I suspect, seeks to blur the distinction between new and old conservatives, as well he might. Sowell is an outspoken defender of the "free market" and a product of the citadel of "conservative economics," the University of Chicago's economics department. Ordinarily I would not refer to a writer's background, but Sowell takes pains in his own letter to establish his credentials. It is unfortunate, therefore, that Sowell's graduate training apparently did not expose him to the economic philosophy of one of the founding fathers of Chicago-school economics. Henry Simons was a fervent opponent of centralized, irresponsible power over private citizens—big business as well as big government. In 1936 he supported vigorous anti-trust prosecution of monopolies and advocated nationalization of railroads and public utilities, as consistent with "old-fashioned economic liberalism" in an age of corporate collectivism. This balance is found in the writings of contemporary neoconservatives very rarely—if ever.

Sowell is correct in observing that there is a strain of antimonopoly thought in free market economics. Adam Smith's comment about "those who live by profit . . . who have generally an interest to deceive and oppress the public" is still the classic denunciation of businessmen as willful monopolizers in restraint of trade. But this is what makes Sowell's statement, that he never heard "businessmen praised at the University of Chicago," remarkably disingenuous. It may be—although I have my doubts—that Milton Friedman and the present generation of Chicagoites do not explicitly praise businessmen. The point is that today's neoconservatives condemn—and their target is always—"government." For every criticism they ever level at business in any way, they must make one hundred attacks or more on government, for everything from "monetary indiscipline" at the Federal Reserve to "initiative-stifling" pollution and product safety regulations to

(Continued on page 639)

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A BAD CASE OF NERVE GAS

CHEMICAL WARFARE was one of the ghastliest features of that evil war we call—prophetically?—World War I. (How many more can mankind survive? III, IV, V? It does not seem very likely.) After that war civilized nations united in their horror at the way gas was used in Europe. Nonetheless, chemical weapons were produced in this country beginning in the early fifties and continuing until ten years ago, when the United States declared a moratorium on their production. Now there is a plan to reverse that decision and resume the manufacture of deadly nerve gas.

The U.S. never destroyed the nerve gas it had on hand, you understand. We just quit manufacturing more of it. What is now proposed is a gas that would be "binary"—that is, it would consist of two separate chemicals which are individually non-lethal and hence safe until joined together. These chemicals would be housed in separate compartments of a shell or bomb; when the shell was fired or the bomb dropped, the barrier dividing the two would rupture and the resulting mixture would be lethal nerve gas. The Army likes the new proposal; it would mean the elimination of most of the present disadvantages of chemical weapons, since binary weapons would be more easy to store and transport and eventually dispose of than ordinary chemical weapons. For this reason the Army has been trying for some time to build a binary production plant, up to now without success, with each attempt defeated by a large margin in Congress. In 1975 Congress went further and prohibited the use of federal funds for the production of lethal binary weapons unless the president first explicitly certified that this was essential to the national security. This he has not done, and the secretaries of state and defense have publicly opposed such a step at this time. Nonetheless, the House Armed Services Committee recently took the peculiar position that the prohibition on the production of nerve gas "does not apply to the development of a production facility," and the entire House went along with this piece of sophistry without debate, followed in turn by the Senate, probably because of unsubstantiated rumors that the Russians were using poison gas in Afghanistan. Unless there is real public protest, the likelihood now is for renewed production of nerve gas—a profound switch in national policy without extended debate or recorded vote in Congress.

Remember that we already have an enormous supply of chemical weapons on hand, including thousands of tons of nerve gas. All the new production project would give us would be a safer horrible means of killing thousands of people—probably civilian men, women, and children, since both Soviet and allied troops have masks and protective clothing to guard them against such gas. The Army says we need nerve gas for our allies in Europe, but as Senator David Pryor of Arkansas pointed out in the *Washington Post*, our allies will not even let us store nerve gas stockpiles on their soil. Indeed, the West Germans find the use of nerve gas so

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repugnant and unacceptable that they have stated they will refuse to train their troops in the use of this weapon in any way. Should Americans feel less strongly?

Some may regard efforts to restrict the horrors of modern weapons as a quixotic effort. We do not. To protest against such weapons is to carry on an age-old Christian tradition in which the church always drew a sharp line between combatant and non-combatant, in which the church constantly tried to "civilize" violence, to lessen its impact, to ease the cruelty of war—even to the point of winning a "truce of God" in which fighting ceased for religious seasons and holy days. This is a tradition we need to continue; in this instance we need a truce of God when it comes to nerve gas.

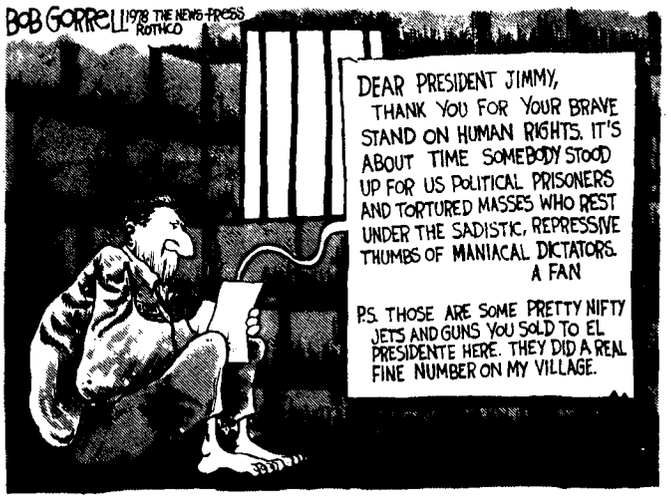
HOOKED ON JUNTAS

Current U.S. policy in El Salvador is predicated on the existence of a moderate center. It is a study in the paranoid style of politics. On the one hand, it is governed by the fear of a right-wing coup and a total massacre of the opposition. On the other side lies the fear of "another Cuba." The pertinent question is whether the rightist coup hasn't already happened, and whether the fear of a left-wing revolution isn't in great part a phantom.

With the collapse last January of the first junta, and with the removal in September of the surviving moderate colonel, Adolfo Arnoldo Majano, it seems fairly clear that all real power is held by the extremist right—and the swelling reign of terror by police and army tends to confirm this. With few exceptions, the center has not held, but moved left to join the revolution. People like Roman Mayorga, former rector of the Central American (Catholic) University, and Ruben Zamora, a leader of the Social Christian Movement, both of whom were in the U.S. last summer representing the united Democratic Revolutionary Front, are hardly cast in the mold of Pol Pot or Castro. Increasingly, it would seem, U.S. policy is based on fictions—of a center that isn't there, of crazy leftists (there are some, no doubt), and of a land reform that serves well to target peasant leaders for assassination. The cathedral and seminary in San Salvador are filled with refugees—refugees from the "land reform," and, according to our informants, they stink, not of excrement, but of fear.

The situation points up the inevitable dilemma of a U.S. human rights foreign policy that labors with a legacy of marketeering blindness to injustice, and which helped create a Frankenstein military monster now so visibly out of control. First, as articles in the summer issues of both *Foreign Affairs* (by William LeoGrande and Carla Anne Robbins) and *Foreign Policy* (by Richard Millett) showed, an individualistic and crisis-oriented human rights policy for this region—and the Third World in general—suffers from the absence of any

COMING: An "Exchange of Views" between Harvey Cox, Cornel West, and others, and Peter Steinfels on Theology in the Americas.


BOB GORRELL 1978 THE NEWS-PRESS ROTHCO
DEAR PRESIDENT JIMMY,
THANK YOU FOR YOUR BRAVE STAND ON HUMAN RIGHTS. IT'S ABOUT TIME SOMEBODY STOOD UP FOR US POLITICAL PRISONERS AND TORTURED MASSES WHO REST UNDER THE SADISTIC, REPRESSIVE THUMBS OF MANIACAL DICTATORS.
A FAN
P.S. THOSE ARE SOME PRETTY NIFTY JETS AND GUNS YOU SOLD TO EL PRESIDENTE HERE. THEY DID A REAL FINE NUMBER ON MY VILLAGE.

long-range planning and support for basic economic, political, and social reconstruction. As Central American moderates frequently observe, our State Department takes notice only when Latin Americans start killing each other.

Secondly, there is no provision for situations where the fascist right seizes control, as it apparently has or is doing in El Salvador, and inaugurates a reign of terror that liquidates popular support and drives the moderate center to the barricades.

A long-term program for the region, one which takes full account of its socially revolutionary temper, is urgent. For the moment, it is time for the U.S. to consider cooling its commitment to the ruling junta—and perhaps gaining some credibility with those who may guide the nation's future. Other nations have already done so. Mexico has withdrawn its ambassador; West Germany has been visibly cool to the junta—in effect, showing willingness to credit the possibility that liberal capitalists can learn to live with flexible and pragmatic socialist programs modeled, as the Salvadorean Revolutionary Front's manifestly is, on Nicaragua's.

U.S. Ambassador Robert White's nightmare is that cooling it would unleash a civil war in which 200,000 or more would die. It would seem, however, that this nightmare has already begun; and, as in Nicaragua during the last days of Somoza, the U.S. has stumbled into backing a right-wing reign of terror, lightly disguised by the fact that it is slow and drawn out.

DOUBLE STANDARD

One of the more curious phenomena of this presidential year has been the degree of political support Mr. Reagan received from the intellectual faction known as neo-conservatives. What is curious about that, one might well ask. Shouldn't conservatives, neo or otherwise, be expected to support the conservative candidate?

That reaction neglects a well-known chapter in recent intellectual history. The fact is that many of today's neo-conservatives made their reputations as political analysts by criticizing the New Right of the 1950s, of which the current Reaganite New Right is a direct descendant. The New Right of

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two decades ago was viewed by these same observers as largely constituted of primitives, yahoos, moralizers, *terribles simplificateurs*, etc., etc. And again, during the Vietnam war years, the same observers kept cautioning the left to damp its protests, lest it stir up those New Right sentiments into a dangerous backlash. Now that the backlash is apparently here, the warners are riding the welcome wagon. What made the neoconservatives abandon their earlier fear and loathing?

Part of the answer is provided in an article by James Q. Wilson in the October issue of *Commentary*. Professor Wilson sees in the New Right a genuine social movement expressing "popular instincts as to what is worth preserving" in America. This judgment is both astute and unduly benign, just as the earlier judgment on the New Right of the fifties may have been too glib and condescending. But what is particularly interesting is the standard that the *Commentary* article advances for evaluating this social movement:

"I confess to finding some of the arguments and activities of the New Right a bit unnerving." writes Wilson, "and I disagree with many of its views. But to write of these movements as if they were entirely composed of dangerous eccentrics is to miss the point. The revolutionary movement of the 1770s the anti-slavery movement of the 1830s, the trade-union movement of the 1880s, the progressive movement of the 1900s, and the feminist movement of the 1910s all had elements that would not bear scrutiny today. Zealotry is the cutting edge of change. . . . To dismiss the movement by disparaging the more vocal elements . . . is to turn one's back on history."

Such an approach to social movements is certainly sound, but is it unfair to ask why it should be reserved for the New Right? For over a decade now, the ordinary fare of neoconservatism has been attacks on the left in America, on the ecology movement, feminism, and various other social movements as though they consisted almost entirely of dangerous eccentrics, attacks emphasizing, at every turn, these movements' zealots and most vocal elements. Funny how one's standards change.

Of several minds: *Abigail McCarthy*

AFTER THE CAMPAIGN

A CHANNEL FOR DISCUSSION

THIS CAMPAIGN of 1980—may its like never afflict us again! It has been ignoble and exhausting. As I went about on the lecture circuit in the last weeks it was impossible to find anyone who felt good about it. For two long years it has been—supposedly—in the forefront of the nation's attention. Why, after a selection process which went on so long, through the announcement period, through primary after primary, caucus after caucus, and convention on convention, did almost all Americans feel so thwarted and so dissatisfied in the arena of political choice?

And what could we say to the people of other countries who saw matters of crucial importance to their own economies and security hanging in the balance or affected by the vagaries of our political winds? As a guest at some of the events of the foreign ministers' conference at the United Nations in September I found myself on the defensive when some of those accompanying the ministers—aides, wives, journalists—queried us Americans in all good faith. "In a nation so developed and with so many millions of educated people, how can you have such a paucity of leaders to choose from?" "How does it happen that a country so big and so important can labor so long about a decision which should be made as quickly as possible and decisively?" When one thinks of the recent elections in Britain, Canada, and Germany one can hardly fault the latter point. It begs the question to say that we have a different system. The system may be different but the end is the same—to provide the nation with effective leaders. We seem to have lost ourselves in the process and forgotten its end.

As a result of the dissatisfaction surrounding this year's election some Americans are looking back fondly to the days of nomination by party and choice by national convention. It was not very long ago that party and conventions gave us Franklin Roosevelt, Adlai Stevenson, Dwight D. Eisenhower, John Kennedy, to name but a few. They were the front runners at those conventions, it is true, but there were also a variety of favorite sons and other serious candidates—any one of whom might have been chosen in case of a deadlock or a series of close votes. The choice was greater in this next-to-final step than it is today.

Was it undemocratic to make the choice in that way? Only if the representative concept is undemocratic. Would it work today? No, because the parties are immeasurably weaker and themselves unrepresentative.

What has happened? The rise of the independent voter, for one thing. The proliferation of primaries, for another. There was a time when I lectured vehemently against the independent. An independent has no effect at the choice level, I used to say. What is independent about being reduced to picking between men selected by others—and others who do not represent you in any way? But the independents have a great deal to do with choices made in primaries. And in less than twelve years the primary—once thought of as a means to which to resort when a party or a president was too inflexible or unyielding—has become the normal means of choice, and the conventions serve only to confirm a choice already made.

Independent voters are supposedly voters who can discern qualities of leadership and know enough, and keep themselves well-informed enough, to understand complex issues and to have ideas as to which solutions to our economic and social problems are preferable, and as to

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what is sound in foreign policy. They need information.

We may reorganize primaries so that they do not exhaust potential presidents and their campaign staffs as they now do, but it is unlikely that we shall give them up. It is equally unlikely that voters will go back to the old party structure or give up the idea of independence. But we must move—and quickly—to improve the method of communication which is conditioning our method of choice in a ridiculously illogical way—television.

David Broder in his recent *Changing of the Guard* (Simon & Schuster, $14.95) on the emerging leaders of the future—people who, he notes, may be unable to lead because of their skepticism about the very idea of authority—points out that all these men and women grew to their political maturity in the age of television and that, in consequence they feel more "in touch" with prominent political figures, and more sensitive to style. But are "style" and the illusionary political intimacy of the camera valid bases for choice? It has become almost a cliché to say that Lincoln would have been ruled out as a candidate by the demands of television. He was not photogenic, and, as contemporary accounts of his appearances show, he was well into his speeches before audiences lost the initial bad impression made by his unprepossessing appearance and his high thin voice. His was the leadership of persuasive development of ideas and of cadenced eloquence. There is no time for that on television now.

The information the independent needs comes to him in snippets on the nightly news. The emphasis is on attention-getting charge and countercharge rather than on policy and program. The selection of these snippets is made by producers and film editors of whose background and bias the voter knows nothing. Panel shows in which candidates are allowed one- and two-minute answers to questions calculated to goad them to some unguarded reaction are hardly more illuminating. And the debates which are no debates at all are a pathetic substitute for what was once a staple of American elections—the chance to see and hear candidates in full-scale examination of each other's positions. Television today does not serve our need—and its cost is draining campaigns financially.

Is there any reason why we cannot take the airwaves which belong to us, and find one free channel for public discussion? That would be one giant step on the way to a mature campaign in 1984.

ABIGAIL McCARTHY

Of several minds: *Frank Getlein*

THE SECRET OF THE PRESS

AND THE SECRET OF THE MEN WHO FOUND IT

WILLIAM SAFIRE, the country's leading Nattering Nabob of Negativism for the last four years, took time off from nattering negatively as the campaign neared its end to explain why so many Americans took a dim view of the candidates offered in that campaign, Not surprisingly on the one hand, but somewhat surprisingly on the other, the fault was that of the press. This was not surprising because it was Safire's standard line when he was supplying standard lines to crooks in the Nixon White House, most notably Spiro Agnew, the well-known household word (like "termites" and "yellow waxy build-up") and receiver of plain, unmarked envelopes containing thousand-dollar bills. It was somewhat surprising because for the last four years, all the time he's been a Nattering Nabob, Safire himself has been employed as a journalist, or at least as something that looks so much like a journalist that no one outside the trade would have thought him anything else. On the face of it, he is attacking himself, but then that was always one of the things the Nixonians did best, never so well as when they thought they were defending themselves against Nabobs and their Nattering.

Safire has discovered—in Boston, for some reason—that the cause of all the talk about "a trio of turkeys" and "none of the above" is "the rise of the female television reporter."

To many, this automatically sounds like sex envy, so Safire is careful to proclaim himself "a good feminist, like Gloria Steinem and Phyllis Schlafly," which is like calling yourself a good emancipationist like Abraham Lincoln and Simon Legree, or a good capitalist like Carnegie and Lenin. There is, of course, a sense in which all three of the second members of those pairs can be called those things, but it is only in the Aesopian mode, and the Aesopian mode, as is well-known, is one of the languages invented by and used by the Soviet Communist Party and its dependencies outside the Union. Thus, I suppose, we may reasonably, inescapably, conclude that Safire is a good Communist.

His main argument, stripped of the all-over alliteration so alluring to Agnew, is that the women hired by networks to make up for years of the non-hiring of women tend to be good-looking. To make up for their good looks, these young women have tended to be tough on the candidates, going swiftly to the reasons for candidatural activities rather than simply turning the cameras over to the candidates themselves to say what they want to say. This aggressiveness on the part of the good-looking young women automatically, in Safire's view, brings on the same kind of behavior on the part of men reporters in competition with the women. The result is that all those reporters are out to do in the candidates and the result of that is that the electorate is unhappy with the candidates, although more unhappy, according to observers who are not Safire, with Carter and Reagan than with Anderson, who was chiefly deprecated because it was thought he had no chance to win.

It's an interesting theory and one entirely in line with Safire's views of the press expounded through the voice of

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Spiro Agnew when Safire was living off the dictionary of alliteration in the cause of keeping crooks out of jail, a cause, it must be admitted, that was finally successful for his two principals if not for his friends and colleagues on lower levels. But then, they weren't buying his purple prose. The two who were kept out of the slammer and under the circumstances that's a high recommendation.

The Safire theory of the press, then and now, is that no reporter ever reports anything, or at least anything political, just because it happened, and never interprets anything, or at least anything political simply because that's the way it looks to him—still less because that's the way it looks to her, in the eyes of this good feminist. No, reporters report what political news they report and interpreters interpret as they do because of some driving need in their professional or personal position. The women have to prove themselves to be more than just pretty faces. The men have to prove themselves to be as savage as the women. So have at them and curst be he—or she—who first cries Hold, enough.

There is, as far as I can see, only one trouble with that theory and that is that the populace began to be disillusioned with Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan—they didn't know about John Anderson—a long, long time before the dread women reporters and intellectual drag queens among the men began doing their stiletto stand-ups on the campaign trail. Personally I dumped Carter when I found that he had lied to me about military expenditures after promising he never would. I'm sure there were thousands like me on that issue and others and thousands more who had the same experience with Reagan.

The Safire theory could still be saved by explaining that those of us prescient enough to be disgusted with the major candidates long before they had the nominations wrapped up became so in anticipation of the the stand-up queens of both genders on the tube. Sir Kenneth Clark did this in his own television stand-up show, *Civilisation*, when he attributed the gloom and doom in Piranesi's etchings to the general effects on Europe as a whole of the Lisbon earthquake. The problem was that Piranesi had made the damned prints twenty years before the earthquake: obviously, as an artist, he was extraordinarily sensitive and knew the earthquake was coming. Similarly the American populace became disgusted with the choice offered them between Carter and Reagan not because they found that choice disgusting but because they knew that eventually those striving women television reporters and their defensive male colleagues would all be snidely sniping. Why not?

Another possible explanation of the perceived general lack of enthusiasm about the major candidates was simply that a lot of readers of the *New York Times* read Safire three times a week in his role of Nattering Nabob of Negativism and after four years concluded that nothing in politics was any good. They knew that Nixon was a crook, that took care of the Republicans. Now Safire was telling them thrice-weekly that Carter was just as big a crook, he was just better at keeping his subordinates out of jail. The logical conclusion: a plague on both your houses. Safire brought on the very condition he deplores and the uppity women seeking jobs as good as his had nothing to do with it.

The Safire theory of press response, namely that the motivation for it is never to be found in the facts being reported or the way they strike the average person of good sense but only in some personal or professional quirk of the reporter, pays off best when applied to its author.

The origin of the Safire theory goes back to his days in the White House. It never occurred to him then and it has not occurred to him since that reporters were reporting that Agnew was a crook simply because Agnew was a crook, certified as such by the Nixon Department of Justice. It never occurred to him then and has not occurred to him since—at least not as far as his thought is reflected in his writing—that the press reported Nixon's lies and obstructions of justice simply because Nixon was lying and obstructing justice. In both cases it was because the press was composed of nattering nabobs of negativism who had to have something to be negative about twice a day.

Apply that to Safire and what do you get?

Well, in the first place, you get a political apparatchik aware well in advance—like Piranesi—that the earthquake was about to destroy his masters, Agnew and Nixon. He therefore programmed Agnew to rage about the land attacking the press as full of radic-libs and badly in need of conservative balance. The *Times* got the message and hired Safire as the house reactionary, despite the fact that the *Times* did not then and does not now have a columnist who could reasonably be described as liberal or Democratic in his work as Safire can certainly be described as reactionary and Republican in his.

Having got the job through the exercise of terrorism by proxy, Safire proceeded to natter negatively about Carter, inventing names such as Lance-gate and Billy-gate deliberately designed to place the failings of the Carter administration as equal in the scale of history to the monstrous attempts by the Nixonites to overthrow the Constitution, destroy the two-party system and institute one-party-one-man government. Safire must be presumed to be intelligent enough to know that a kid brother leeching onto an obvious target like oil-rich Libya really is not equivalent to White House burglars breaking into the headquarters of the opposition party, into psychiatrists' offices and into we don't yet know how many homes of Washington correspondents and subordinates of Henry Kissinger. Why then would he make that equivalency?

He would do so because he has a deep psychological need to demonstrate that although, obviously, he worked for crooks, the fact is that all presidents are crooks, therefore to work for a president is to work for a crook. The only odd thing is that he has not yet attacked Walter Mondale, who holds the job Agnew held when Safire was helping him defend his crookedness.

Meanwhile, Safire is yet one more Nixonite upon whom occupational therapy has failed. He's had four years with the nearest thing to a first-rate paper we have and he still doesn't know how the press works. FRANK GETLEIN

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By the waters of Disneyland

A STORY

DAVID LODGE

IN AMERICA, Ruth traveled from city to city, from convent to convent, like a medieval pilgrim, making notes about the changes that were taking place in the lives of nuns. She had been awarded a six-months' traveling scholarship for this project, but when her time was up she felt that she had only scratched the surface of the subject and wrote home for permission to stay longer. She relied on the religious communities she visited for food and accommodation, repaying their hospitality with whatever work was appropriate. She did substitute teaching in schools, auxiliary nursing in hospitals, helped look after senior citizens and mentally handicapped children. Sometimes she donned her habit and gave talks about the Roman Catholic church in England to parochial groups. Afterwards people would come up to her and shake her hand warmly, sometimes pressing into it a large-denomination dollar bill "to help with your expenses, sister." At first she was embarrassed by these gifts, but after a while she got used to them, and indeed came to rely on such gratuities for her pocket money.

American nuns, she soon discovered, were in a state of upheaval that made England seem quite tranquil by comparison. In Cleveland, Ohio, she came across a community that had until recently been enclosed, supporting itself precariously by embroidering priests' vestments, and had suddenly decided to train all its members in chiropody and turned itself into a foot clinic. In Detroit, Michigan, a nun in high boots and a mini-skirt ran a free school for juvenile delinquents and led a successful rent-strike against profiteering landlords. In St. Louis, Ruth interviewed a sister who was secretary-general of an organization dedicated to opposing male chauvinism in the church. She wore a trouser suit and scattered words like "crap" and "bullshit" in her conversation. On the wall behind her head a poster depicted Moses telling the Israelities: "*And She's black . . .* " In Texas, Ruth visited a community of nuns who came down to breakfast with their hair in huge plastic curlers. After a hasty grace ("Good food, good meat, good God, let's eat") they tucked into hot cakes and bacon; then, immaculately coiffed, and clad in smart clothes, they swept off in huge shiny convertibles to their jobs as personal secretaries in downtown Houston. In the evenings they had dates with priests, who took them out to restaurants and movie shows.

Ruth herself had adventures. Traveling through the night on a Greyhound bus, dressed, as was her custom now, in ordinary clothes, she realized that the man in the next seat had placed his hand on her knee. She froze, wondering what to do. Scream? Cut and run? Stop the bus? After half an hour she dared a look sideways. The man was asleep, his limbs limp, his mouth open. Slowly, carefully, Ruth lifted his hand from her knee and restored it to his own. Eventually she slept herself and woke to find her head on the man's shoulder. "I didn't like to waken you," he said with a smile, chafing his numbed arm. Ruth blushed crimson and muttered her apologies. "You're welcome," said the man. At the next rest stop he insisted on buying her coffee and doughnuts and telling her the story of his life. He was a shoe salesman, recently retired, going to spend a vacation with his son and daughter-in-law in Denver. "You'd really like them," he assured her. "They made a trip to London a few years back. You'd have a lot in common. Why don't you plan to stay over in Denver a whiles?" When they got back into the bus, Ruth took a seat next to a black woman with a baby on her lap and pretended not to see the hurt and longing look the shoe salesman sent in her direction across the aisle. At the time, this episode distressed her, but afterwards she was vexed to think how upset she had been, or "uptight" as the feminist nun in St Louis would have put it. When, some time later, an ugly but genial man tried to pick her up at Dallas airport, she didn't panic, but waited patiently for an opportunity to mention that she was a nun. "No *kidding*!" he said, staring. "Hey, I wouldn't have made a pass at you if I'd known. Jesus—sorry—wow! Hey, I went to a parochial school myself, you know? I mean, I was *taught* by sisters." He seemed almost afraid that they would rise up out of the past to punish him. He took out his wallet and tried to press a donation on her. Fending off the proffered dollar bills, Ruth glimpsed a woman on a nearby bench observing them with disapproval.

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"Put your money away, you're giving scandal," she said, giggling. She dined off the story more than once.

At last she came to the coast of California, which seemed as far as she could go. Her Mother Superior wrote reluctantly agreeing to a three-month extension of her leave. The letter was fretful and discouraged. One nun had just left the community and another was on the brink. There had been only two new postulants admitted to the motherhouse that year.

II

RUTH WROTE home for a further extension. It was refused. Come home, her Mother Superior urged, you are needed. Sixth Form science is suffering. Ruth procrastinated, equivocated. She did not want to go home. She felt that she was in the middle of some spiritual quest that could not be abandoned, though she did not know where or when it would end. As for Sixth Form science suffering, that was all rot. The real reason why Mother Superior wanted her back was because two more nuns had left the convent and morale was low. One of the women concerned had written to Ruth. "*I'll make no bones about it*," she wrote, "*I left to get married, and not to anyone in particular. I woke up one morning and realized that I couldn't face the rest of my life on my own, without a man, without children. I'm going out with a nice fellow now, a widower with two boys, we met through an agency. I'm taking cookery lessons. When I tried to cook a dinner for John and the children he said it was the worst meal he had ever had in his life. I suppose that after a number of years in a convent your taste buds get anaesthetized . . .*"

Ruth herself did not suffer unduly from the pangs of frustrated sexual and maternal longing, but she did feel that there was something missing from her life as a religious, and that she had to find it before she returned home. She wrote back to her Mother Superior: "*I am going through a crisis about my vocation. I must see it through over here.*" Mother Superior wired: "RETURN IMMEDIATELY." Ruth ignored the summons. She did not know whether she had been suspended. She did not greatly care.

It was a time of intense political activity in America, and priests and nuns were throwing themselves into the struggle for civil rights, for peace in Vietnam, for the protection of the environment. Ruth marched and demonstrated on behalf of the Berrigan brothers, Catholic priests jailed for burning draft cards and alleged conspiracy against the state, and was herself arrested and jailed for a night. She hitchhiked to Southern California to support the strike of exploited Chicano grape-pickers. Her picket line was broken up by thugs hired by the employers. Ruth was hit in the chest and pushed to the ground, screaming "You cad!" at her attacker. "Those mothers are mean-looking mothers, ain't they?" said the worker who picked her up and dusted her down. After that experience, Ruth wore her habit on demos and enjoyed a certain immunity from assault, though an element of risk remained. Thus attired, she stood among a crowd of two thousand on a college campus at the height of the Cambodian crisis, chanting, "*Pigs out! Pigs out!*" and fled from a charge of police dressed like spacemen, her eyes streaming from tear gas. "Mean-looking mothers, aren't they?" she gasped to a startled fellow-demonstrator. This term of abuse, which she privately interpreted as a contraction of "Mother Superior," had rather caught her fancy, and she continued to use it freely until enlightened as to its true derivation by an amused Franciscan friar during a sit-in at a napalm factory.

From these experiences Ruth emerged proud and self-reliant. Her life before America, dull and orderly, seemed like an album of monochrome photographs in her memory. But still she hadn't found what she was looking for. The euphoria, the inspiring sense of solidarity with one's brothers and sisters, that was generated by marches and demonstrations, soon evaporated. Eventually the columns dispersed, the marchers went their separate ways. "This is the darnedest time," said Josephine, a Paulist sister from Iowa, on one such occasion, just after a big peace rally in San Francisco. The two of them were drinking coffee out of paper cups in a bus-station automat in the middle of the night, waiting for their connections. Blue strip lighting bleakly illuminated the Formica tables and the littered floor. "While the rally's going on, you feel just great, right?" Josephine went on. "Like, people are really digging each other, the barriers are down, and when everybody's singing 'We Shall Overcome,' or 'They'll Know We Are Christians By Our Love,' you feel it's really true. You think to yourself, gee, this is really great, this is the New Jerusalem, this is what it's all about. But it doesn't last. Soon you're in some lousy automat, zonked out, and the party's over."

"I suppose it couldn't last, in the nature of things," said Ruth philosophically. "You couldn't keep up that intense emotional pitch for long."

"It's not just that. The others on the demo, ordinary people, have got homes, real homes to go back to. Husbands, wives, families. Folks waiting to welcome them back, wanting to hear all about it. That must be real nice." Ruth nodded sympathetically, knowing that Josephine's community did not approve of her radical activities and would not want to know anything at all about that weekend's demonstration. "Whereas, for us, it's just an anticlimax, going back. Anticlimax and loneliness. Gee, I get so depressed after one of these rallies. . . . D'you know what I do, Ruth?" Josephine looked around, and although the automat was empty apart from themselves and a black soldier asleep in the far corner, lowered her voice. "I buy myself a little miniature bottle of Southern Comfort and then I fill me a big deep tub, very hot, and I have a long, long soak. I lie there for hours, taking a sip of Southern Comfort every now and then, and topping up the hot water in the tub. I usually wind up giving myself another kind of Southern Comfort, you know what I mean?"

"No," said Ruth, truthfully. Josephine looked at her with a strange expression—quizzical, sceptical, slightly wicked—

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and suddenly Ruth guessed what she was talking about, and blushed vividly. "Oh," she said.

"D'you think I'm going crazy, Ruth? said Josephine. "D'you think I should get out before I'm totally screwed up by this life?"

"I don't know," said Ruth. "Don't ask me. I don't even know about myself."

III

STILL RUTH lingered on the coast of California. *"I take it you have severed your connection with the Order,"* her Mother Superior wrote, *"No, still looking for an answer,"* Ruth wrote back. She received no reply.

One day she had a letter from Josephine, the Paulist nun who flashed upon her inward eye every time she saw an advertisement for a certain brand of bourbon. Ruth opened the letter fully expecting that it would announce that the writer had left her Order, probably to get married. To her surprise, Josephine wrote: "After I got back from San Francisco I nosedived into the usual pits. Then I started to go to a prayer group and it changed my life. I've been baptized in the Holy Spirit, and I've never felt so calm, so happy, so sure of my vocation."

This was not the first testimony Ruth had heard to the growing prayer group movement, or Charismatic Renewal as it was sometimes called, but it was the most impressive.

At this time, in the early summer of 1973, Ruth was earning her keep helping in a residential institution for mentally handicapped adults near Los Angeles—or perhaps it was *in* Los Angeles—she never quite knew where the sprawling city began and ended. The institution was lavishly furnished and equipped with the conscience money of the families who had dumped their defective dependents there, but the work was demanding and sometimes distressing. The place was run by a diminutive red-haired nun called Charlotte who generally wore training shoes and a track suit. She was a Judo black belt and sometimes she needed to be.

Ruth showed her the letter. "What d'you think about this charismatic business, Charlotte?"

"Me? I couldn't exist without it."

"You mean you actually go to one of these prayer groups?"

"Sure. Haven't you tried it?"

"I'm afraid it wouldn't be my cup of tea. I'd just be embarrassed."

"Everybody's embarrassed at first. You soon get over that. You wanna come along with me one evening?"

"I'll think about it."

Later Charlotte said, "Hey, Ruth, next weekend there's a Day of Renewal over in Anaheim. A big affair, folks from all over coming to it. There's plenary session in the morning, then small groups in the afternoon. Wind up with Mass. Whaddya say?"

Encouraged by the prospect of a large gathering in which she could be an observer rather than a participant, Ruth agreed to go. The following Sunday Charlotte drove them over to Anaheim, a dull satellite of L.A. chiefly celebrated as the home of Disneyland. Some two or three hundred people were gathered together in the assembly hall of a Catholic junior high school. There were few seats vacant by the time Ruth and Charlotte arrived, and they had to separate. On the stage, which was festooned with banners declaring "JESUS LIVES" and "PRAISE GOD," was a small band of guitar-and-accordion-players dressed in jeans and plaid shirts, and a priest MC at the microphone who led the assembly in hymns and prayers. Ruth was faintly reminded of a concert party at a Girl Guide rally she had attended many years ago: there was the same air of determined joyfulness and good fellowship about the proceedings. When the MC instructed everyone to hold their neighbors' hands as he prayed for the Spirit to descend upon them all, she stiffened in recoil and surrendered her hand reluctantly to the clammy palm of the stout woman sitting next to her. It seemed such an obvious gimmick to create an illusion of togetherness. The MC invited any of those present to pray aloud as if they were in their own homes and to share their thoughts with others. Several people obliged. The accepted mode of prayer was highly informal, personal, intimate, speaking to God as though he were another person present in the room. "We praise you, Lord, simply because you're alive and with us, and that makes all the difference." "Lord, I just have to tell you that I think you're really great." "Lord, you make the sun shine and the flowers grow, you made everything. You're so wonderful, Lord, you lift us up when we're down, you comfort us when we're sick, you rejoice with us when we're happy. We really love you, Lord. We really praise you." Listening to this drivel, Ruth felt herself burning in one big blush.

The MC introduced a speaker evidently well known to the audience, who applauded him vigorously. He was a tall, bony, middle-aged man, with flat hair combed back from a tanned, wrinkled face. He wore a sports jacket and slacks with a collar and tie. He looked as if he might be a salesman for something agricultural. First he relaxed the audience with a few in-jokes. "Did you know that Bishop Fulton Sheen and Cardinal McIn-

How Far Can You Go, from which these pages are excerpted, is David Lodge's sixth novel. Published in Britain last spring, it was described as "about Faith" by the *TLS* reviewer. "The novel's discussion of faith which, at its most straightforward . . . is a simple expository account of doctrinal developments, is exemplified, as in a parable, by a narrative about the lives of . . . a group of Catholic friends, first encountered as undergraduates and last seen resolving, with more or less suffering and finality, the sexual upheavals of early middle-age." Lodge's previous novels include *Changing Places* and *The British Museum Is Falling Down*. He teaches modern English literature at the University of Birmingham, has published a number of volumes of criticism, and reviews frequently for the *Times Literary Supplement*.

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tyre were traveling to the Holy Land for a Charismatic Congress and the Cardinal said to the Bishop, 'If you're going to speak in tongues, I'm going to be walking on the water.' '' The audience laughed and clapped. Then the speaker asked if there were any Britishers present. Charlotte, seated a few rows ahead of Ruth, looked back at her expectantly, but Ruth kept her hands clasped firmly in her lap. A few hands went up among the audience. Well, said the speaker, they would know that the British had an airline called British European Airways, BEA for short, and it had struck him when he was on vacation in Europe and flying BEA from Amsterdam to London that those letters could also stand for true Christian faith: ''Believe, Expect, Accept. Believe in God. Expect Him to come to you. Accept Him when he comes. . . .'' After talking for a while on the power of prayer, and the difference it had made to his own life, he led the congregation in his favorite hymn, *''Oh, the love of my Lord is the essence.''* When they had sung the words of the last verse, he continued to hum the melody into the microphone, and the congregation followed suit, modulating into a variety of strange noises, keening and coaxing and crooning sounds, harmonized like a humming top, punctuated with occasional ejaculations—''Amen!'' ''Hallelujah!'' ''Praise Jesus!'' Ruth glanced around her. Most of her neighbors had their eyes shut and were swaying in their seats. The stout woman had her fists clenched and was muttering over and over again, ''Praise Jesus, Praise Jesus.'' Suddenly, from the back of the hall, a voice was raised high in some foreign language, a strange, barbaric-sounding dialect, full of ululating vowels, like a savage chant. So it was true: people really did speak in tongues at these gatherings. How childish it was, just like abracadabra, anyone could pretend to do it. But in spite of herself Ruth felt her skin prickle with the strangeness of it, the high, confident, fluent tone of the utterance. It stopped abruptly. ''Thank you, Jesus,'' said the speaker at the microphone casually. ''Thank you, Jesus,'' the congregation echoed. ''Could we pray for an interpretation?'' said the speaker. There was silence for a moment, then the stout woman beside Ruth stood up and said, ''The Lord says, 'If any man is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away; behold, the new has come.' The Charismatic Renewal is the new creation. It is everyone's chance to be born anew. We can be like newborn babes in the Spirit.'' She sat down. ''Thank you, Jesus,'' said the speaker. ''Thank you, Jesus,'' murmured the rest. ''Could we pray for a healing?'' said somebody. ''Could we pray for my sister's little boy who is seriously ill with a suspected brain tumor?'' The speaker asked them all to join hands while he prayed with them. At this point Ruth got to her feet and left.

Charlotte hurried out into the lobby behind her. ''What's the matter, Ruth?'' she asked anxiously. ''You OK?''

''I just couldn't take any more,'' said Ruth. ''I felt faint. Something about the atmosphere.''

''Yeah, it is kinda stuffy.''

''I mean the emotional atmosphere.''

''Take a little walk outside, you'll feel better. This afternoon it'll be the small groups. Quieter. You'll maybe feel more at ease.''

''I really don't think I can take any more today, Charlotte.''

Charlotte eyed her quizzically. ''You're sure you're not fighting something, Ruth?''

''Only nausea. Look, I don't want to spoil your day. I'll meet you back here at four, all right?''

''What will you do till then? Why not join a small group this afternoon, huh? Give the Holy Spirit an even break.''

Ruth shook her head and left the building. For a while she walked aimlessly along the rectilinear streets of one-story houses, each with its little plot of coarse grass over which the sprinkler hoses plied monotonously, then through a commercial district of shops, gas stations, motels and funeral parlors. Most of the shops were shut, as it was Sunday. Ruth felt hungry and thirsty, but there seemed nowhere suitable to go, only drive-in hamburger places which she felt self-conscious of approaching on foot, or dimly lit bars advertising topless dancers. Eventually she found herself among crowds converging on Disneyland, and thinking that this would be as good a place as any to kill time, passed through the turnstiles. There was certainly no shortage of refreshment inside—the only problem was deciding in what architectural facsimile you wanted to consume it: a Wild West saloon or a wigwam encampment or a space-ship or a Mississippi paddleboat. It was a world of appearances, of pastiche and parody and pretense. Nothing was real except the people who perambulated its broad avenues, fingering their little books of tickets, patiently lining up for the Casey Jr Circus Train, the Peter Pan Flight, the Jungle Cruise, the Monorail Ride. Music filtered from loudspeakers concealed in the trees and fountains played and the Stars and Stripes hung limply from a hundred flagpoles. Huge grinning plaster figures of Disney characters proffered litter baskets at every intersection of paths. Children ran about with balloons, ice-cream, candy-floss, and popcorn under the complacent eyes of their parents.

One such couple, overweight, brightly dressed, festooned with cameras, sat down on Ruth's bench to rest their feet, and the wife volunteered the information that they had come all the way from South Dakota. ''Not just to see Disneyland?'' said Ruth, with a smile, but they didn't seem to see anything amusing in the idea. ''Well, we're seeing a lot of other places as well,'' said the woman, ''but this is the high-spot of the vacation, isn't that right, Al?'' Al said it was right. ''He's always been crazy to see Disneyland,'' said the woman fondly, ''ever since I started dating him.''

It struck Ruth that Disneyland was indeed a place of pilgrimage. The customers had an air about them of believers who had finally made it to Mecca, to the Holy Places. They had come to celebrate their own myths of origin and salvation—the plantation, the frontier, the technological utopia—and to pay homage to their heroes, gods and fairies: Buffalo Bill, Davy Crockett, Mickey Mouse, and Donald

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Duck. The perception at first pleased and then depressed her. She looked at the crowds ambling along in the smog-veiled sunshine, from one fake sideshow to another, chewing, sucking, drinking, licking, and was seized with a strange nausea and terror. For all their superficial amiability and decency they were *benighted*, glutted with unreality. Ruth began to recite to herself the words of Isaiah: *"For the heart of this nation has grown coarse, their ears are dull of hearing, and they have shut their eyes, for fear they should see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and be converted and healed by me."* But she must have spoken the words aloud, for the woman from South Dakota turned to her enquiringly. "I was just thinking," said Ruth "that if Jesus really lives, you wouldn't know it in here." The woman stared. "Well, I don't go much on religion, myself," she said, uneasily. "My husband used to be a Christian Scientist, didn't you, Al?" Al gave a sickly grin and said they ought to be getting along. They left Ruth sitting alone on her bench, staring back at her over their shoulders from a safe distance.

Ruth got to her feet and walked rapidly in the opposite direction, to the Exit turnstiles. She hurried back to the school. In each of the classrooms a small prayer group was in progress. She went from room to room, looking for Charlotte through the little observation windows in the doors. One door had no window, and she opened it. Half a dozen faces turned in her direction. Charlotte's was not one of them. The stout woman who had sat next to her in the assembly hall smiled at her. "Come and join us. Where have you been?"

"I've been to Disneyland," Ruth said, closing the door behind her, and joining the circle of chairs. The others laughed uncertainly.

"And what did you think of it?"

"I thought it was like the world must have been before Christ came."

There was a surprised silence.

"Walt Disney was a good man, a god-fearing man," said someone, a shade reproachfully.

The stout woman said, "I don't think Ruth is really telling us about Disneyland. I think she's telling us something about herself. Isn't that right, honey?"

To her astonishment and acute embarrassment, tears began to roll down Ruth's cheeks. She nodded and sniffed, groping in her handbag for a Kleenex. "All my life as a nun there's been one thing missing, the one thing that gives it any point or sense, and that's, well, real faith in God. It sounds ridiculous, but I don't think I ever had it before. I mean, I believed in Him with my head, and I believed with my heart in doing good works, but the two never came together, I never believed in Him with my heart. Do you understand what I mean?"

The stout woman nodded eagerly. "Would you like us to pray over you, honey?"

Ruth knelt, and the other people present clustered round and put their hands on her head. Even before the woman began to speak, Ruth felt a profound sense of bliss descend upon her.

That night she began to pack her bags for the journey home. She wired her Mother Superior: "BY THE WATERS OF DISNEYLAND I SAT DOWN AND WEPT STOP HAVE FOUND WHAT IVE BEEN LOOKING FOR STOP RETURNING IMMEDIATELY"

A NEGLECTED NOBEL-PRIZEWINNER

Rediscovering Sigrid Undset

MAURA BOLAND

ONE DAY in 1900, a librarian in Oslo was surprised to receive a borrowing slip from a pretty eighteen-year-old secretary: the book requested, *Heilagra Manna Sogur*, a book of legends about holy men and women, had never been out on loan since its publication. I thought of this not long ago when I went to a library to borrow some books by Sigrid Undset. *Kristin Lavransdatter* had the musty, dusty look of books which have lain too long on the shelves. The rest were in the stacks and I checked the dates: none had been out since 1954. The librarian confirmed my suspicion that today Sigrid Undset—the young Norwegian secretary who was to become one of the century's greatest novelists—is one of those writers whose works are more respected than read.

It was not always so. After she received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1928, Sigrid Undset was world-famous. Her books were translated into the major European languages and were bestsellers in Europe and the United States. But since her death in 1949, interest in Sigrid Undset has declined and very little critical attention has been given to her books.

Unlike many of her famous contemporaries—Proust, Mann, Joyce, Virginia Woolf—she used the conventional narrative form and experimented with no new literary techniques. This helps to account for her neglect in academic circles. Then there is her moral vision. In a recent anthology of women's fiction, a modern critic says, ". . . Her religious

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worldview is an embarrassment to critics who have established that nihilism is the only accurate description of the way things are in the post-Christian era. Above all, her belief in the old virtues of loyalty, moderation and a sense of responsibility seems decidedly out of step in a narcissistic age."

Sigrid Undset was born in Denmark in 1882 but grew up in Oslo where her father, the internationally-famous Norwegian archaeologist Ingvald Undset, was associated with the University Museum. As a child she read widely in Scandinavian and world history, and she loved the Old Norse and Icelandic sagas long before she could fully understand them.

For several years she attended a progressive, liberally-oriented school, but soon became disillusioned with both liberalism and formal education. (She was already disillusioned with Protestantism.) At fifteen, she decided against attending a university and also gave up her early ambition to be a painter. She needed to support herself as soon as possible, so she enrolled in a commercial college. For the next ten years she worked as a secretary in Oslo. Her experience of life broadened, her work brought her into contact with people very different from those she had known in her childhood. In her spare time, she laid the foundations for her writing career, acquiring an extensive knowledge of Shakespeare, the Elizabethan lyricists, Keats, Shelley, as well as Ibsen and other Norwegian writers. Above all, she read everything she could find pertaining to her first love, the Middle Ages: history, sagas, ballads, romances, the German minnesingers.

At twenty, she wrote a novel set in medieval Norway, but this was rejected with the advice that she try something modern instead. Her first published book was *Mrs. Marta Oulie* (1907), a short modern novel on the theme of marital infidelity. It was followed by a play, *In the Gray Light of Dawn*, and a collection of short stories, *The Happy Age*. All were fairly well received and Undset was able to give up her office job. Her first important novel, *Jenny*, was published in 1911. Jenny, a struggling young artist, cannot find total fulfillment in her work and longs for a man she can love and respect. In her loneliness Jenny has several affairs with men she does not love; eventually she commits suicide.

Jenny caused an outcry in feminist circles. The suffragettes felt that Undset had betrayed the image of the emancipated woman. In fact, she sympathized with women who had to fight for their social and economic rights. At the same time, she was opposed to any development which would undermine the position of wife and mother, for she regarded the family, and especially the central role of the mother, as the nucleus of all civilization. Her reverence for motherhood is a recurrent theme: for example, in the short story "Thjodolf," Helene Johansen, a middle-aged fisherman's wife, finds happiness and meaning in her devotion to a young foster child.

Jenny consolidated the author's growing fame. The book is typical of Undset's early period. While Jenny is a sympathetic character, she is always shown as a victim of her own weakness, not of society. Undset was no determinist. Also characteristic is the author's frank treatment of female sexuality.

In 1912 Sigrid Undset married Anders Svarstad, a divorced artist with three children. Three children were born to them: two sons, Anders and Hans, and a mentally-retarded daughter, Maren Charlotte. Little is known about the marriage, but it appears to have been unhappy. By 1919 they had separated, and the marriage was annulled when Undset entered the Catholic church in 1924. (In many of her writings, Undset expresses her views of marriage as a sacrament but not necessarily a lifelong romance. We can draw our own conclusions.) In 1919, she moved to Lillehammer in the valley of Gudbrandsdal, the scene of the opening section of *Kristin Lavransdatter*.

Up to this point Sigrid Undset was an accomplished and successful writer. Though she had made a few excursions into the Middle Ages with *The Story of Viga-Ljot and Vigdis* (1909) and *Tales of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table* (1915), most of her early works are set in contemporary Oslo and concern woman's role in marriage and in society. Her characters are ordinary, middle-class people: young housewives, office girls living in boarding houses, aging spinsters consoling themselves with imaginary love affairs. Many live in a spiritual vacuum and find their lives unrewarding. Undset invariably treats them with sympathy and understanding. Oddly enough, her short stories are more uniformly successful than her early novels; some, like "Simonsen," are classics. However, to find her true literary voice she had to return to the Middle Ages, the period for which she had such an extraordinary affinity. By now she was well along the road towards Christianity and her 1924 entry into the Catholic church; and the medieval worldview had virtually become her own. But there is no sharp break in her thought before and after her conversion. Her themes remain the same, but from now on they are viewed in the light of Christian orthodoxy.

The early twentieth century was an auspicious time to work on *Kristin Lavransdatter* and *The Master of Hestviken*. For several decades there had been a great revival of interest in Norway's Middle Ages. In doing her research, Undset had access to primary sources and also corresponded regularly with such leading scholars as Fredrik Paasche. But research alone is not enough to create a masterpiece. George Eliot also did a vast amount of research for her novel *Romola*, which is set in Renaissance Florence, but her characters are unmistakably Victorians set adrift in an alien world. Undset's medieval novels are different. Hers was an almost mystical ability to transcend time and space and make the past contemporary with the present. She did not, however, attempt to re-create the *style* of the Middle Ages, as she had done, unconvincingly, in

Thank God (oops!) for accuracy

"**UNDSET, Sigrid** (1882-1949) Norwegian novelist who won the Nobel Prize in 1928 for the best seller *Kristin Lavransdatter*, a historical trilogy set in fourteenth-century Norway. This was solid, competent fiction, and unusually accurate. Her later work is religiose and of less interest." —Martin Seymour-Smith, ed., *Novels and Novelists*, (St. Martin's, 1980)

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The Story of Viga-Ljot and Vigdis, which is an imitation of the Old Icelandic sagas.

Although she herself regarded *The Master of Hestviken*, a medieval tetralogy published in 1925 and 1927, as superior, *Kristin Lavransdatter* was the work that made Sigrid Undset world-famous. It was first published as three separate novels: *The Garland (Kransen)* in 1920; *The Mistress of Husaby (Husfrue)* in 1921; and *The Cross (Korset)* in 1922.

KRISTIN LAVRANSDATTER is one of the most magnificently alive characters in all literature. She is also one of the great romantic heroines—but one with a difference. If she were Juliet, she would commit suicide in the first part of the trilogy, when her youthful raptures are spent and her uncertain fate lies in the hands of her father. If she were Anna Karenina (whom she resembles even more) she would do it in the second part, after her mature passion has turned to bitterness and resentment. But Kristin does what few romantic heroines have been allowed to do: she lives on, grows old, and concerns herself with the fate of her soul.

At fifteen, Kristin is betrothed by her father to Simon Andresson, the heir to a neighboring estate. She accepts her father's choice, but when she meets Erlend Nilulausson, a dark and handsome knight with a bad reputation, she realizes that he, not Simon, is the man of her dreams. All the standard ingredients of romance are present as the two pledge their eternal love. But theirs is a difficult position. Although, under Canon Law, Kristin cannot be forced to marry against her will, her betrothal cannot be broken without grave embarrassment to her father. Worse, Erlend has been exiled for living in adultery and has two children by his mistress, Eline Ormsdatter. But they are determined to marry, no matter what the cost. After a long struggle, Kristin manages to win her father's consent to the marriage, though he does not realize that she is pregnant and that she and her lover have driven Erlend's mistress to suicide. Kristin's wedding day is overshadowed by remorse and fear for her unborn child. She realizes what sin brings with it: one must tread others underfoot. As she kneels at the wedding Mass, falsely wearing the golden garland of maidenhood, she vows to do penance when her child is born.

In the years that follow, Kristin occupies herself with the administration of Erlend's estate, which has fallen into decay, and the rearing of their seven sons. But in spite of her heartfelt repentance and good intentions, frequent quarrels spring up between husband and wife and their relationship slowly deteriorates. Only when Erlend is sentenced to death for treason does Kristin realize how much she loves him. She manages to secure his release, but he has to forfeit Husaby.

In part three, Kristin and Erlend are living at Jorundgaard, which Kristin inherited on her father's death. Erlend accepts his changed fortunes gracefully enough, but once again Kristin finds herself unfairly burdened as she tries to preserve her inheritance for her sons. Once again, she and Erlend grow apart, and finally Erlend can bear no more and moves to an abandoned shack in the mountains. When at last he returns, to defend her against the charge that he is not the father of her last child, he is killed by an angry crowd. After his death, life becomes increasingly empty for Kristin Lavransdatter. She enters a convent at Rein, intending to become a nun. When the Black Death breaks out she devotes herself to the sick and dying, but she, too, becomes a victim of the plague.

IN *Kristin Lavransdatter* Sigrid Undset demonstrates an epic sweep and power worthy of Tolstoy. The trilogy spans nearly fifty years, ranging over most of fourteenth-century Norway: it encompasses the whole of life, the whole of society and the full spectrum of human emotions. It finds a place for murder, witchcraft, political intrigue—the violent deeds of a violent age—as well as poetry and romance.

But there is unity in all this diversity. One unifying factor is the common faith shared by master and servant, king and priest. There are relatively few principal characters, and these are nearly all related by blood or marriage. The sense of community, and the continuity of life is emphasized as Kristin lies in childbirth while her father lies on his deathbed. The central theme—the tension between the will of God and the will of man—is kept to the foreground by the use of numerous parallels, contrasts and cross-references. Erlend's attitude towards his illegitimate daughter, Margaret, forms an ironic parallel both to his own past behavior towards Kristin and to Kristin's father's attitude towards her. Kristin's anguish of soul is contrasted to the peace of mind enjoyed by her father, who has always lived in conformity with God's will. The conscientious Simon Andresson, whom Kristin rejects and who marries her younger sister, is constantly compared to Erlend, the man she chose herself: it is Simon who sustains her in many an hour of need. Another illuminating parallel is that between Erlend and his priest brother, Gunnulf, who shares Erlend's adventurous spirit but has channeled it into missionary zeal.

The great dramatic events of the novel are vividly described, with Undset's use of the concrete detail creating a splendid illusion of reality: the suicide-murder of Eline Ormsdatter, aided and abetted by Erlend's aund, lady Aaschild, who is suspected of witchcraft and who shares many of her nephew's less palatable traits; Kristin's agonizing first childbirth in the great hall at Husaby, with all the ladies of the parish in attendance as midwives; her father's funeral train, which he plans himself, followed by his stallion bearing his armor and weapons, and two fat cows as gifts for the priests; and the horror of the Black Death, which swept through Europe in 1349 and which claims the lives of Kristin and her two oldest sons who have become monks. Much of the action takes place in the context of daily work. We see Kristin shaking lice from the bed-clothes at Husaby, embroidering a shirt for Erlend, preparing reindeer for a wedding feast, nursing her children through scarlet fever. We are introduced to the ordinary routine of medieval life as the farmers go about their sowing and reaping, the priests tend their flocks, and the nobles discuss affairs of state.

But, ultimately, it is her keen penetration into the hearts and souls of human beings that makes Sigrid Undset one of the

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greatest of novelists. She had the honesty to hold a mirror up to human nature and look at it without equivocation. Though she does not idealize her characters, neither does she place undue emphasis on evil as, for example, Mauriac does. Her concern is the normal, not the grotesque, and she loves her characters in all their mortal fallibility.

All the characters in the novel are fully-realized human beings, from the archbishop down to the seven little Erlendssons, each of whom has his own distinct personality and his separate destiny. But Kristin Lavransdatter herself remains the dominant figure, as well as the most complex.

The novel sometimes gives the impression that Kristin's lifelong spiritual struggle is the direct result of the wrongdoing surrounding her marriage. But there are other factors at work, as Erlend knows well: "It is not from holiness, Kristin, that you are always tearing open these old sins of ours, but it is to have a weapon to use against me every time I oppose you in anything." True, Kristin's love affair with Erlend plunged her into sin and guilt; and, though she repents and is forgiven, her spiritual condition remains precarious.

In fact, Kristin's besetting sin is pride, and a stubborn insistence that things must go her way. These tendencies lead her repeatedly into acts of anger, cruelty, and revenge. Since her childhood, she knew that hers was a deeply divided nature: She is always psychologically consistent, though her objectives change over the course of her life. Her youthful determination to win Erlend is transformed into ambition for her sons and a determination to provide for their futures.

In many ways, Kristin is an admirable woman: devoted to her children, kind to the servants, generous to the poor, deeply regretful of the wrongs she did her parents. But too often her

good deeds spring from unpleasant motives. She never accepts the changing circumstances of life, but is bent on conquering fate by the power of her will. She is even proud of the fact that she has grown old and bitter in the process.

In describing the relationship between Kristin and Erlend, Sigrid Undset shows her remarkable insight into the nature of marriage. For as the cares of life oppress her, Kristin turns her anger against the one she loves most. She resents Erlend's insouciance, his indifference to fortune, even the very love their children bear him. But he remains the man she married: adventurous, courageous in war, thoughtless and selfish in many ways, but kindhearted, too, and totally lacking in malice. He is perfectly suited to the chivalric life of heroic deeds, totally unfitted for the domestic life she envisions for him. But his love for her is never in doubt: "You know well, Kristin—whether you come by night or by day—whether I wait for you for a long time or a short time—I shall always welcome you as though you were the Queen of Heaven come down to my croft from the skies."

In the last analysis, *Kristin Lavransdatter* is a commentary on the meaning of life, and the sorrow which underlies all human existence: "It dawned on Kristin Lavransdatter in a new way that the interpreters of God's word were right. The life of the body was irremediably plagued with troubles. In this world, where human beings interbreed, beget new generations, and, loving their own flesh are impelled one to another by the body's lust, bitterness of heart and disappointed hopes must come as surely as the frost comes in autumn." All fires burn out at last, thinks Kristin, as she approaches her journey's end. But the work is not a tragedy. As she lies on her deathbed, Kristin knows that "a handmaid of God had she been." In spite of her disloyalty and intransigence, he had held her fast in his service, and beyond lies freedom and salvation.

IT WOULD BE gratifying to think that the recent publication of *Kristin Lavransdatter* in paperback (by Bantam) for the first time may signal a renewal of interest in Sigrid Undset. The neglect she has suffered, despite the reasons for it I suggested earlier, is surprising in an age of militant feminism, when obscure women artists—literary and otherwise—are being resurrected, and when women of high achievement are the focus of so much attention.

Surely Sigrid Undset ranks as a woman of high achievement. Her range as writer was vast, her knowledge of history and literature encyclopedic. In addition to *Kristin Lavransdatter* and *The Master of Hestviken*, the medieval epics which are her acknowledged masterpieces, she wrote seven novels set in contemporary Norway, another, *Madame Dorthea*, set in the eighteenth century, several volumes of short stories, translations of Icelandic sagas, as well as numerous articles, essays and book reviews.

Her life was as impressive as her works. She was the devoted mother of three children and three stepchildren. Although she always gave priority to her family responsibilities, she never stopped writing. With the help of black coffee and cigarettes, she would work far into the night after the children were in bed.

She was also a great patriot. When the Nazis invaded Norway in 1940, her son, Anders, was killed in action and she herself forced into exile in the United States, where she worked tirelessly for the liberation of Norway. The Nazis burned her books and chopped up the desk at which she had written her famous novels. King Haakon VII conferred on her the Grand Cross of the Order of Saint Olav. She was the first woman commoner in one hundred years to receive this honor.

Sigrid Undset was a true novelist, not a religious propagandist, as is sometimes charged. But in her greatest works she concentrates on the individual's relationship to God and our eternal destinies. It is the material of tragedy—and divine comedy. To read one of them is to step into a world of truth and light.

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Screen

OLD MOVIES NEVER DIE

THEY JUST FADE AWAY

I USED to go to the movies three nights a week, often to double bills, and about half of what I saw were repertory films. These weren't all classics. Some were. But many were just routine films of the past that happened to fill a gap in my knowledge of a genre I liked, such as *film noir*, or otherwise brought me up to date. What I liked about seeing all those old films, even the ones I'd already seen before umpteen times, was the illusion of having been a moviegoer for seventy-five years. It gave me a certain perspective, I felt. It made me a witness to history, someone like the unseen interviewer on the old *You Are There* television series who went to the Battle of Concord one week, the eruption of Vesuvius the next, and the discovery of the Easter Islands the week after that. Sometimes history was a little jumbled in my mind, but at least the present didn't get out of proportion as much as it usually tends to for weekly reviewers.

Recently, however, I haven't been seeing so many old movies. The reason is partly that I've been doing research in another field, and partly that I've been going to more new releases. The effect has sometimes been to make me despair of movies. Having lost track of their past, I find myself thinking of movies as having no future. It was in this frame of mind that I dutifully showed up again this year for the press screenings at the New York Film Festival, which, at least at first, did very little to cheer me up. All the films I looked forward to because of their directors' work at earlier festivals seemed not to pan out.

Despite the promise of *Handle with Care* several years ago, for instance, Jonathan Demme's two subsequent films, and especially his new *Melvin and Howard*, have been very routine. More disappointing still was Andrzej Wajda's *The Orchestra Conductor* starring John Gielgud. Last year Wajda showed two films of extraordinary beauty, *Without Anaesthesia* and *The Young Girls of Wilko*, each of which had a commercial run of exactly one day in America after the festival closed. With Gielgud in the title role this year, Wajda's work seemed to have a better chance, except that this film is a rather weak and bombastic one *because of* the title role. The whole business seemed to me just another exercise in futility of the sort I so often see in this country, where personal films of great merit go unseen and consequently tempt their directors to do inferior work with more commercial appeal. Even the first of several retrospective films shown, Roberto Rossellini's *Europa 51*, which hasn't been seen here in over a quarter of a century, didn't revive my faith in movies.

On the contrary, it seemed to confirm the pattern suggested by Wajda's recent career. Having had to work almost covertly to make *Open City* in 1944, splicing together stock from rolls of still-camera film and improvising locations in the wake of the German withdrawal from Rome, Rossellini had made a tight, spare masterpiece, a seminal film. Now, six years later, with more time, greater resources, and Ingrid Bergman, he was indulging in sentimental claptrap, fantasies about the capacity of the poor to inspire social and spiritual uplift in the rich. The use Rossellini had made of the city in the earlier film allowed him to raise political questions without even trying to do so. Now that sense of the reality of the city was gone, the drama reduced to a melodrama among a few, cliché characters, the political questions turned into a lot of waffling. The film was little more than a meditation on Ingrid Bergman.

The low point came with the presentation Martin Scorsese sent to the festival as part of his campaign to get Eastman Kodak to develop a more permanent color movie film. (Since the mid-fifties most color films have been made on Eastman stock which, unlike the more expensive and now obsolete Technicolor, fades away to pink within a generation or less.) The film clips made Scorsese's point so repetitiously and the young assistant he sent to do the presentation was such a laid-back California type—in between rambling anecdotes and shuffled notes he kept reminding himself aloud, "Marty's gonna kill me if I leave anything out"—that we could feel the preservation campaign, like the color stock itself, fading right before our eyes. I felt a resignation to the loss of all past, present, and future color films coming over me. It was a pity, to be sure, but many works of man have been lost in time. What did it matter, what effect on the course of the world could it have, compared to, say, the destruction of the library at Alexandria? Maybe movies were just an ephemeral and dispensable part of man's history anyway.

Then the house lights went down and the screen lit up, and for the next day and a half the festival, which had seemed such a dud, exploded like a skyrocket. The first of the three films that so suddenly and unexpectedly brought the movies back to life, just when I thought all had been lost, was Sergio Leone's 1968 color epic, *Once upon a Time in the West*, which may well be the greatest Western ever made. It is still very much in circulation, and I'd seen it myself a couple of times (though always in a cut version). But Scorsese had sent his own print to the festival to remind us just how magnificent a color, widescreen movie in mint condition can be. Very magnificent. In the opening scene, Woody Strode puts on his hat to keep water from dripping on his head, and Jack Elam traps a pesky fly in the barrel of his gun. This takes five minutes. It's how the two men pass the time while waiting to shoot down Charles Bronson when he steps off the afternoon train. With this one scene, Leone has us totally in his power for the rest of the film's two-hour-plus running time.

Watching the film immediately made me want to see *A Fistful of Dollars* and Leone's other spaghetti Westerns again, until I realized with some panic that there might not still be unfaded prints available. Maybe, it occurred to me, I wasn't as ready as I thought to see movie history disappear from the face of the earth. *(The first of two parts.)*

COLIN L. WESTERBECK, JR.

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Books: TAKING ATHEISM SERIOUSLY

DOES GOD EXIST?
AN ANSWER FOR TODAY

Hans Küng

Translated by Edward Quinn

Doubleday, $17.50, 839 pp.

Leonard Swidler

THIS is a passionate book, passionately researched, reasoned, and almost reckless in its daring to probe ultimate questions for their ultimate consequences, whatever they might be. The introduction tells us Küng's answer to the question, Does God exist? A firm "yes." But the reader discovers that this answer was not a pat solution known beforehand, so that the charade of the arguments for and against could be run through with great show but no risk. No, it is clear that Küng has taken atheism and nihilism utterly seriously, has said yes to many of their claims, has contemplated the abysses to which they point as real human options. For some the experience of reading this book might be scary as hell, for they will learn there are no easy, once and for all answers to the final questions of human existence. With Küng, everyone must struggle, constantly, for her or his own answers.

However, in Küng the reader has a guide not only of complete integrity, but also of extraordinary breadth and depth of knowledge and great clarity of expression. The book analyzes thoroughly and sympathetically many of the pertinent thinkers from Descartes to the present. Here is intellectual history at its best. The reader comes to understand the thought of the thinker from within—but more, comes to know something of the person of the thinker. The problem of theism and atheism is not simply that of a set of abstract questions and answers which would occur to any reflective human being. For Western humanity the problem is something that grew up in a particular historical, social, and ideological context that both brought it into existence and gave it the particular shape it has. Hence, our difficulty can be properly understood and responded to only when analyzed within the matrix. Küng admirably provides that necessary setting and within it proceeds masterfully to the analysis of the thinker's ideas.

As noted, each thinker is taken seriously and understood sympathetically, but by no means uncritically. After providing the overall setting for each and as sympathetic a presentation from within as possible, Küng proceeds with an analysis which states clearly and fearlessly the positive elements of appreciation for his subject's position. There follows a critique of those portions of the subject's thought that Küng finds unsatisfactory, and why.

Küng spends a good deal of time analyzing Hegel's thought (for which he is amply prepared, having written a 704-page book on Hegel—*Menschwerdung Gottes*, Herder, 1970) because it was so transformative of the notion of God and because this God concept provided the basis for Feuerbach's and Marx's modern presentation of atheism. Küng finds Feuerbach's atheistic analysis the more fundamental of the two by far; even Freud's psychological projection theory was basically anticipated by Feuerbach. In the end, Küng grants that the existence of God cannot be demonstrated in a rationally compelling way, but also insists that the arguments against the existence of God cannot be rationally demonstrated either. That leads Küng to his basic notion in this whole problematic: fundamental trust. This fundamental trust is first given in the meaningfulness of reality, thereby turning away from Nietzschean nihilism. Küng's fundamental trust is not some sort of fideism or irrationalism, but rather, as he writes:

> If I in a consistent manner do not close myself to reality . . . I will thus perceive—*neither before, nor only afterwards*, but in the very act itself—that I am doing the right thing, indeed, "the most rational" thing. For what beforehand is not subject to proof of our experience . . . I experience *in the act of trust itself*.

At the same time Küng takes Nietzsche seriously (Küng is obviously very partial toward Nietzsche and devotes over eighty pages directly to his thought) and also the fundamental option of nihilism. He states:

> Nihilism is *possible*. The pervasive questionableness of reality itself makes nihilism possible. . . . *Nihilism is not disprovable*. There is no necessarily convincing argument against the possibility of nihilism. It is even at least possible that this human life is ultimately meaningless, that accident, a blind fate, chaos, absurdity and illusion rules the world, that everything ultimately is ambiguous, meaningless, worthless, nothing . . . [but Küng adds that] *nihilism is not provable*. There is no rational argument for the necessity of accepting nihilism.

The arguments for and against the existence of God are dealt with in similar fashion. God's existence can be neither proved nor disproved, but "the no to God means an ultimately ungrounded basic trust in reality. . . . Whoever denies God does not know why ultimately he trusts reality." As with the meaningfulness of reality, one affirms the existence of God by a free act of reasonable *trust* and in the very act itself perceives "that I am doing the right thing, indeed at bottom 'the most rational thing'."

One of the great strengths of Küng's book is the clarity and flowing style he attains (at the pain of an immense amount of labor). His translator Edward Quinn is to be congratulated for his fluent English translation, but he is to be severely criticized for unwarrantedly burdening *Does God Exist?* with the constant sexist translation of the unobjectionably generic *Mensch* by the objectionably generic "man." Most major American

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publishing houses have long since produced non-sexist language guidelines which reject such usage.

Along with Bernard Häring, I would say that *Does God Exist?* is to date Küng's best and most helpful book. Why, oh why, does the Vatican attack him now?

The American dream in fragments

LOON LAKE

E. L. Doctorow

Random House, $11.95, 258 pp.

Saul Maloff

THE last page of E. L. Doctorow's new novel, *Loon Lake*, is composed entirely of a biographical digest-of-sorts, set out coldly and emptily, void of life as any computer printout or Who's Who entry. It is a skeletal "life" of Joseph Korzeniowski, the protagonist-narrator, from his origins in a working-class "ethnic" family in Paterson, New Jersey, to the year 1936, his astonishingly knowing eighteenth and the year (a turning-point of course for America and the world) in which most of the novel's pivotal action is centered. But though the novel itself concludes in 1936, the barebones life is swiftly foretold in highly detailed confidence to the year 1975.

Having changed his name to Joseph Paterson Bennett in 1941 under this sponsorship of his patron F. W. Bennett, robber baron, who has amassed an immense industrial fortune as well as an immense estate in the Loon Lake district of the Adirondacks, we learn that en route to becoming F. W.'s surrogate son—appropriating not only Bennett's name but his fortune, estates, board directorships, trusteeships, club memberships, virtual identity, his very skin seemingly—he had embarked, after the close of the novel and with its certification, so to speak, on what is almost a parody of one version of American upper-class Wasp career: Williams College (varsity letters in lacrosse and swimming, ROTC, "Most Likely to Succeed" and incidentally an honors degree in Political Science), an Air Corps commission, OSS leading to a career in CIA and eventful elevation to its higher echelons, two failed marriages, an Ambassadorship, the ultimate possession of the lordly fiefdom of Loon Lake—a paradigm of American success.

None of this is absorbed into the narrative, or even foreshadowed by other events; and while all of it is historically plausible, none of it, it may be argued, is artistically inevitable, or necessary. Given these antecedents, Doctorow seems to be saying, we can securely prophesy these developments, among others which lie within the range of

Kierkegaard's Writings

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Cloth, $18.50. Paper, $4.95

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Michael Niflis

A Federal Sexton Speaks

"Twenty-eight of the national cemeteries are inactive with no space for future burials."

This well-won grave
beside the noisy city
embraces a very sleepy young man.
He has honored this sinking earth
through the zenith
of a thousand honking afternoons.

Yet these severed
roses blush fresh
against the mirrored granite
and a woman keeps this stone face
free from dust, breaking twigs
and tearing dusty leaves.

I hide my face
behind creepers that climb
a federal crying place.

As a boy I once wondered
over a duck noisily nudging
her crushed drake
to finish crossing a road
that runs away to someplace.

The children command
a kitten on a string.

To them an unknown soldier.
Unknown as the affront was to him
for which he was hurried off to bed.

David Leedy

Port Blakely Cemetery

1.

No flourish, no wind
or sound; and child, snow starts
like our acceptance
in your first hour here.

2.

We've stopped praying, we watch the snow fall,
two standing people with a Stellar's jay.
We cannot end this day.

But child we see how white it is,
no branch to fly to, or from,
and see it done.

Roy Scheele

Changing the Flowers

In the newer cemetery, south of town,
the markers barely show above the ground—
the marble bolsters of eternal sleep.
Only the plastic flowers in their urns
Keep up the memory across the years
of cuttings in a glass beside the bed,
and someone lifted from the pillows there
with someone else's hand beneath his head.

Anne Porter

Four Poems in One

At six o'clock this morning
I saw the rising sun
Resting on the ground like a boulder
In the thicket back of the school,
A single great ember
About the height of a man.

Night has gone like a sickness,
The sky is pure and whole.
Our Lady of Poland spire
Is rosy with first light,
Starlings above it shatter their
dark flock.
Notes of the Angelus
Leave their great iron cup
And slowly, three by three
Visit the Polish gardens round about,
Dahlias shaggy with frost
Sheds with their leaning tools
Rosebushes wrapped in burlap
Skiffs upside down on trestles
Like dishes after supper.

These are the poems I'd show you
But you're no longer alive.
The cables creaked and shook
Lowering the heavy box.
The rented artificial grass
Still left exposed
That gritty gash of earth
Yellow and mixed with stones
Taking your body
That never in this world
Will we see again, or touch.

We know little
We can tell less
But one thing I know
One thing I can tell
I will see you again in Jerusalem
Which is of such beauty
No matter what country you come from
You will be more at home there
Than ever with father or mother
Than even with lover or friend
And once we're within her borders
Death will hunt us in vain.

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American possibilities of that time and place.

Hardly a typical American life, but in a special sense it is a representative one. "Joe of Paterson," as he refers to himself (as if in repudiation not only of his parents but of his ethnic and class affiliations through them), lives out a variant of primary American fantasy, derived in the main from movies and books. Rather the converse of fantasy, a mockery of the fantasy: Doctorow is not writing lighthearted picaresque but a moral fable full of shadow and foreboding. What does a vigorous, energetic, smart, ambitious eighteen-year-old fresh out of high school (Paterson Latin, we learn on that abundant last page) who is not notably fastidious about ways of hustling a living do in the year 1936, a time not exactly overflowing with choices? First he gets out fast—out of the old neighborhood, of town, of family, all of them gone and forgotten the moment he leaves, not a tear shed, an awkward embrace enacted, not a backward glance. Out to the open road, the American romance of the road, and whatever may turn up next, so long as it isn't a life just like his father's, only elsewhere.

And what turns up next is that fairytale fantasy of childhood and ancient dream of disconnection from personal and social ties, that American dream of absolute freedom in the wild—the traveling carnival; only this one, in which he serves as roustabout and factotum, is grim and sordid, mysterious, threatening, owned by a sinister, ugly, menacingly silent, rapacious character whose season ends in a ghostly moonlit scene of grotesque horror. The carnival's main attraction, the Fat Lady—cretinous, elephantine, a dumb mountain of meat set up for the kill, yet somehow made touching, almost delicate and lyrical by a beautiful feat of the author's sympathetic imagination—is made to take on all comers, the leering, bestial yokels pouring out of the nearby hills in the end of night for the murderous bloodbath, while the owner calmly rakes in the price of admission, the biggest gross of the season, a bundle that Joe, fleeing the scene with the owner's wife, manages to come by and which he throws to the wind in a seizure of moral revulsion. So much for the romance of "running away from home and joining the circus."

Almost at that very moment he witnesses in a fleeting tableau another image of pure American fantasy: the lonesome train hurtling by in the night through the wide vistas of virgin American territory bound for strange, faraway places. Only this train, the stuff of American folklore, will decisively change and ultimately determine the rest of the boy's life. The romantic vision is perfectly fulfilled: this train is a private train, an imperially luxurious private train running a private track through forests and into the mountains to the Loon Lake fastness where the party of guests will disport themselves for a weekend of royal pleasure. In a lighted compartment of the flashing vision the boy sees standing before her dressing mirror, appraising herself closely, a beautiful naked girl. And then the apparition is gone, vanished into the depthless American night.

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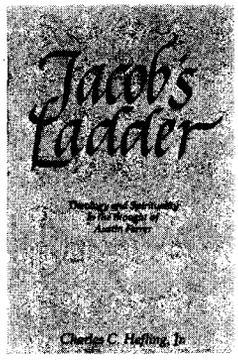

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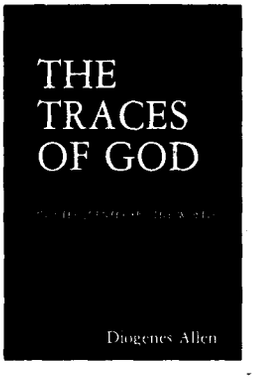

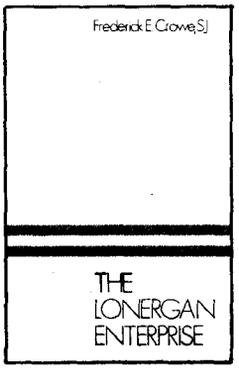

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Only not quite: the bewitched boy of the romantic legend must follow the enchanted maiden; he can do no other but respond helplessly to the siren's summons. Only in this anti-romantic version she is a mobster's moll, a house-gift for the host, and the mobster is the infamous Tommy Crapo, whose entrepreneurial specialty is strikebreaking and unionbusting—a highly marketable enterprise—with a little killing on the side should that regrettable necessity arise; and Bennett, the lord of the manor, whose weekend guests have more typically included moguls, kings, artists (Chaplin among them), has had and now has mutually profitable business relations with Crapo and his thugs and gunmen.

Now all this, in conveying the impression that *Loon Lake* is a conventional novel unfolded along traditional narrative lines, is grossly misleading. As readers and admirers of *The Book of Daniel* and *Ragtime* know, Doctorow is nothing if not a greatly accomplished, enormously skillful and resourceful, stylistically strong and subtle, highly venturesome novelist, who disdains conventional modes while disdaining even more the blandishments of mere chic (though in some of the pointlessly unpunctuated passages he succumbs) and the empty gestures of what passes for the avant garde. Doctorow's new novel employs strategies of discontinuity, splintering, fragmentation, and certain innovations—novelties perhaps is a better term—as the governing aesthetic principles. Fragmentary intimations and retrospective views, recurring motifs and passages, sudden shifts and leaps in perspective and narrative voice, time and place, events left suspended only to be unexpectedly resumed later, the surprising intrusion of (deliberately) awful prosy verses, the work of Warren Penfield, a shambling, disheveled, besotted poet who is a kind of court retainer and clown, a man who has come there years before to kill Bennett (with good reason) and stayed to accept his patronage—all these and other devices and mannerisms exert a shattering pressure on the narrative surface, resulting in a fiction of parts, segments, shards, crystals. Piecemeal, at wide intervals, we learn that Penfield goes off on what is intended as a round-the-world airplane trip with Bennett's wife, a celebrated flyer, and they will disappear into the blue; that the boy will make his way out of Loon Lake with his trophy Clara and will lose her again to Crapo, and after that take up with the child-wife of one of Crapo's spies who is murdered not by the union organizers he has betrayed but by his employer, and that he will in the midst of their flight to California and its promises of a new life desert her, abruptly abandon her and her child, disappear while she sleeps and return to Loon Lake and his patron and the waiting future.

The danger for the novelist is that the multifaceted manner, so ornate and elaborate, so contrived and self-conscious, so pervasive and inescapable—that the manner, the technical apparatus of the novel, can overwhelm the wonderfully imagined fiction itself, leaving little more than the performance, the virtuosity, the dazzling display; and it is only Doctorow's high seriousness, artistic conscience and powerful gifts that prevent such sundering and dissolution. *Loon Lake* is a work of marvelous fragments and noble intentions, and it is unmistakably the work of a formidable writer, clearly one of the very small band of novelists here or anywhere, with a claim on our most serious attention. But we are asked to take too much on faith, asked in fact to collaborate in the act of creation: a notation is not a life, an anecdote is not a myth, a dip in the lake—even a triumphantly strong swim in the shimmering waters of Loon Lake in full view of the formerly omnipotent, now aged and diminished "father"—is not a ritual rebirth. If, finally, *Loon Lake* fails to attain the reverberant wholeness and coherence of the fully achieved work of art, it is the kind of superb "failure" which exposes the hollowness and glitter of most literary success.

The preacher's gift

THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

D. Cleverly Ford

Eerdmans, $12.95, 253 pp.

TELL THE NEXT GENERATION

Walter Burghardt, S.J.

Paulist Press, $6.95, 225 pp.

Michael Zeik

THE NEWS is out. Somewhere along the line, the editors of *Commonweal* discovered that I am (at my age!) a closet S.A.—a sermon *aficionado*. Yes, I probably enjoy a good sermon as much as a good movie; high praise indeed, if you accept the honesty of the statement.

These two books, assigned to me as a reward for my refined taste in pleasure, are related to each other as theory and practice. In the first, D.C. Ford, Senior Chaplain to the Archbishop of Canterbury (and, incidentally, to Queen Elizabeth), investigates the historical development and theological basis for religious preaching, from Old Testament times, through the early days of the church, and down through successive periods of Western Christendom. The second work, by Father Walter Burghardt, the well known Woodstock scholar, and the editor of *Theological Studies*, is a selection of his post-Vatican II sermons. That both are books which ask the hard questions is already in their favor; that they avoid the easy answers, is even more appropriate in this, the year of Our Lord, 1980.

Ford begins by acknowledging that for very many, perhaps most, the era of "preaching" is finished. The very word implies a kind of smug moral superiority that we are no longer willing to accord the Professor of Divinity over some unmarried slum-mother of four, struggling to bring up her children. Indoctrination is another dirty word; "all certainties are dead certainties," and the pulpit seems to have gone the way of the dinosaur.

Not necessarily so, counters Ford. Not if the priest or minister has himself (herself?) shared the bread of affliction with his flock. Not if he has both mastered the

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scriptural and theological tools of his trade, and is deeply committed to the contemporary world in which, as always, the Gospel seed must find its soil. And not, especially, if the preacher is *a man of God*. For the authority of a preacher, in the last resort, argues the Senior Chaplain, does not derive from his knowledge of Greek and Hebrew, or Medieval or Marxist scholasticism, but only from his being *a man of God*. "The category is rare and is more likely to be sensed than classified. Yet . . . when such a man speaks there is nothing you can say or do except listen . . . All who hear him know it, they know it 'in their bones'."

Two, of many, fine insights in the book, deserve special mention: the first, regarding the vexed question of preaching and politics; the second, our contemporary nervousness with dogmas like the Incarnation and Resurrection.

Like most readers of this journal, I enjoy Dom Helder Camara's pronouncements in Brazil more than the (recent) ones of Cardinal Madeiros in Boston. But what is the *principle* which ought to guide us in these matters? Ford points out that, beginning with the Prophets of Israel, Yahweh's spokesmen have never confined themselves to "churchy" matters. Our religous life is surely as much tied up with politics and society, as with the religious life of ancient Israel. "All this," sums up the Senior Chaplain, "calls for *involvement, though not absorption* in the social and political aspirations of the day." The passion, death, and resurrection of Christ remain archetypes of such power in our lives, that to forget them is to forget Christianity.

But what are we to make of these traditional doctrines? By the time scholars like Ebeling and Fuchs, Tillich and Bultmann are through with the Resurrection, the bewildered preacher may not be inclined to add any tentative comments of his own. I like what Ford says about these central teachings: Don't worry about them; they are "tough." The Resurrection, in particular, "does not, it will not, go away." A rocky island in the midst of an ocean of reassessment and criticism, it will be there to challenge and exasperate the generations succeeding our own.

Obviously, Father Burghardt read Ford's book—how else explain the excellence of most of his sermons in this collection? But the very thing that makes his book easy to read renders it difficult to review: it contains not one, but a dozen fascinating themes, varying according to the nature of the occasion, or the liturgical season in which they were delivered. It will probably be best if I just enumerate some of the ideas which most impressed me.

"I have never looked forward to dying," writes the Jesuit scholar, and "despite . . . a half century in religious life, I have never shared the yearning of the saints to move into eternity. In fact I am quite unenthusiastic about leaving this life. . . . Death is an insult; the stupidest, ugliest thing that can happen to a human being." It is only following an introduction like this that I am likely to find credible any conceivable sermon on dying.

Nor does Father Burghardt wax pious on the subject of suffering. There is little doubt that none of us will escape the quandary of Job. Trying, however awkwardly, to do good, we will find ourselves sometimes overwhelmed by evil, crushed by affliction. Our human wisdom bankrupt, we will, like Job, turn to God for an answer; we had better be prepared for the one he gave Job. God does not defend his policies, but insists on his mysteries: "Where were you when I created the universe?" "The Book of Job," insists Burghardt, "does not teach us how to understand evil, but how to live with it."

Grim stuff; but, paradoxically, his Lenten sermon is not. Crediting Jean Leclercq for his "asceticism of humor," the writer suggests that what we give up for Lent—far sweeter than candy, and more alluring than sin—is that self-preoccupation by which we take ourselves at least as seriously as we take God. With a little distance, our heartaches and hiatal hernias may be seen in their proper perspective, and we can forget ourselves a little—bundles of contradiction that we are. Aristotle defined us as rational animals; Burghardt calls us "angels with an incredible capacity for beer."

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But if you have any remaining doubt about this priest's sense of reality, let me conclude with his advice to a Jesuit scholastic about to take his solemn vows. By these three vows, poverty, chastity, and obedience, Father Burghardt warns him, he risks not becoming a man. He risks avoiding "the encounter with three elemental forces"—an encounter with the earth, with woman, and with his own spirit. By poverty he risks a parasitic life, living off the collectivity. By chastity he risks the death of his own sexuality. By obedience he risks permanent adolescence. I submit that only someone knowing the risks is entitled to take them.

If you are dissatisfied with your Sunday sermons, take this book with you, and choose something appropriate for the occasion.

Detachment, democracy, & dissent

WALTER LIPPMANN AND THE AMERICAN CENTURY

Ronald Steel

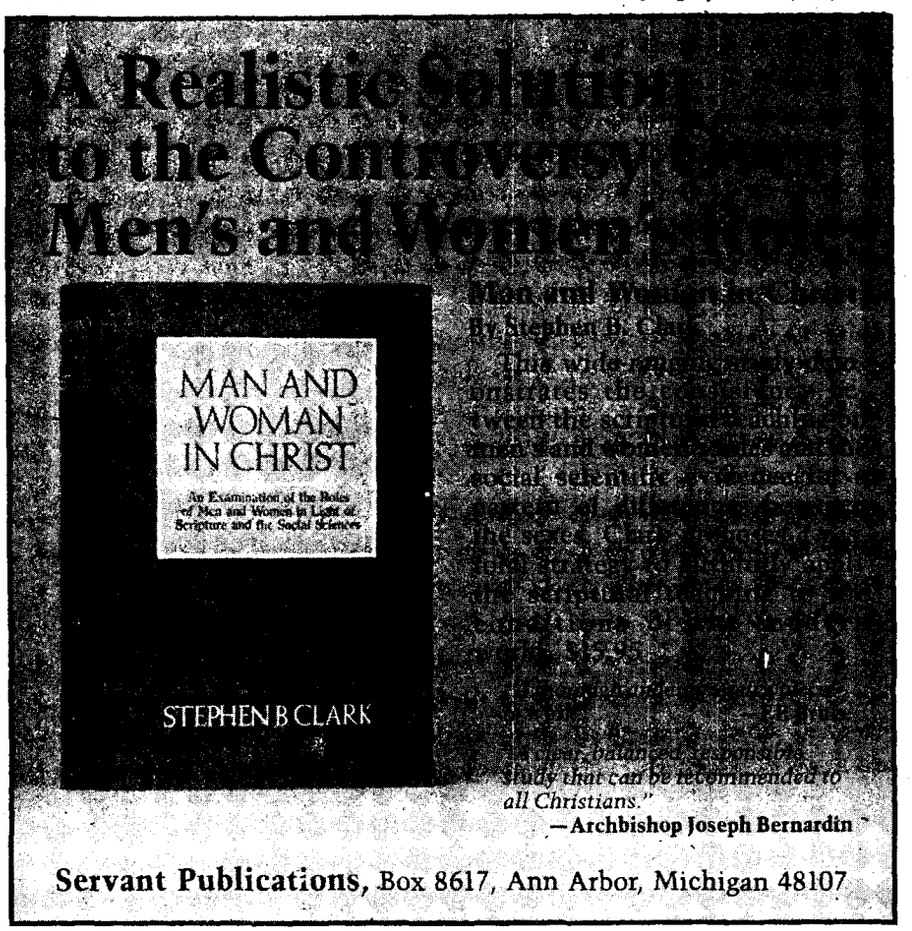
Atlantic-Little, Brown, $19.95, 640 pp.

Richard Wightman Fox

AMONG American intellectuals in the twentieth century Walter Lippmann was one of a kind. His career was astonishingly long. It spanned nearly six decades, including active participation as a propagandist in the war effort between 1915-1918 and the anti-war effort between 1965-1968. He loved ideas, especially Platonic, "essentialist" ones, yet spent most of his adult life writing enormously influential editorials and columns about the contingencies of politics and history. He was a committed climber who early learned to cultivate the well-bred and powerful. But while he would commonly surrender his journalistic detachment when a friendly leader first catered to him, men in power could not count indefinitely upon his loyalty—as Woodrow Wilson, Theodore and Franklin Roosevelt, and Lyndon Johnson all came in time to discover. He was a German-American Jew capable of promoting a quota on Jewish admissions at Harvard, making blatantly anti-Semitic statements in print, and ignoring the plight of European Jewry in the thirties and forties. He was a cosmopolitan, "public" man who was at sea in the stormy waters of personal relations: in his forties, dissatisfied with his marriage, he leapt into a torrid, secret affair with his best friend's wife, decided to marry her when Hamilton Fish Armstrong accidentally learned of their deception, and then sent Armstrong an aggrieved letter that dwelt upon his own "unabated suffering."

Ronald Steel's monumental, authorized biography—based on Lippmann's unpublished letters, diaries, and oral reminiscences—is a masterful chronicle of the public life and a startling revelation of the private man. The account of Lippmann's early years is especially vivid. At age sixteen he entered Harvard, where distinguished faculty including William James, George Santayana, and Graham Wallas took turns praising his precociousness. James was so impressed by one of his published pieces that he knocked on Lippmann's dormitory door to congratulate him in person. The nineteen-year-old opened it. "Recovering from his stupefaction, and quick, as always, to seize upon an opportunity, Lippmann suggested that they take a little walk together through the Yard . . . The philosopher, impressed by Lippmann's charm and intellectual curiosity, suggested he come to tea." Private tea with James turned into a regular ritual.

After graduating in 1910 Lippmann worked as secretary to the Socialist mayor of Schenectady, did research and writing for Lincoln Steffens, published two important books on politics, and joined the *New Republic* as one of its three founding editors in 1915—when he was all of twenty-five. During the war he ingratiated himself with Colonel House and Newton Baker, respectively Woodrow Wilson's closest aide and Secretary of War, and played a leading part in de-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signing the Fourteen Points. After the war, still short of his thirtieth birthday, Lippmann stopped to ask himself how he could best exert influence in an era of deep public disillusionment. His answer was to become an editorialist—during the twenties for Pulitzer's *New York World*, and starting in the thirties for the *Herald Tribune*. His "Today and Tomorrow" column in the *Tribune* was eventually syndicated in over 200 dailies. No other columnist in American newspaper history has remotely approached Lippmann's influence. On his frequent foreign tours heads of state tripped over one another trying to secure a place in his appointment book. When Khrushchev informed him that their interview in Moscow would have to be delayed a few days because of a political crisis, Lippmann replied that it would be quite impossible to change the schedule. Khrushchev quickly found a way to accommodate him.

Steel's discussions, indeed dissection, of Lippmann's character puts the public career in perspective. Lippmann was a pampered but unloved only child who early developed a steely emotional reserve as a defense against other people. He was also uncomfortable about being Jewish. His total devotion to a public career among the men of the political and economic elites was a way of both submerging his private life and transcending his Jewish roots. He came to speak of the Jews with the same dignified scorn as elite WASP nativists. "The bad economic habits of the Jew," he wrote in 1915, "his exploiting of simple people, has caused his victims to assert their own nationality." Just after the Nazi book-burnings of May, 1933, he stressed in his column that it would be unfair to judge the Germans by the Nazis—just as it would be wrong to judge "the Jews by their parvenus."

Steel rightly takes Lippmann to task for his occasional anti-Semitic remarks, which he considers to be not just an error of judgment or a psychological blind-spot, but a moral failure. But in discussing his affair with Helen Byrne Armstrong he tends to adopt Lippmann's own self-justifying posture; far from amounting to a moral failing, it was an uncontrollable eruption of the private, submerged Lippmann. It was no one's fault, and it made Lippmann—in Steel's view—not only a happier but in many ways a better person. It gave him "emotional strength" and delivered him from the "stoic detachment" to which he had surrendered during his first, unhappy marriage. Hamilton Fish Armstrong, editor of the Council on Foreign Relations' *Foreign Affairs*, was not so sure that it was ultimately all for the best. In the remaining thirty-five years of his editorship, as Steel points out, he refused to permit any references to Lippmann in the influential journal. He never forgave his former wife or his former best friend.

The book treats Lippmann's public and private lives in such detail and for the most part with such probing discrimination, that it is hardly fair to criticize it for not providing a full analysis of his intellectual contribution. But it is worth noting that the task remains for another author to write Lippmann's intellectual biography. Steel may be right that Lippmann was not at his best as a "theorist," yet his writings were extremely important in the emergence of an anti-democratic consensus among political observers and thinkers in the middle third of the twentieth century. As Steel notes, Lippmann's *Public Opinion* (1922) was in John Dewey's words "perhaps the most effective indictment of democracy as currently conceived ever penned." Like his first book *A Preface to Politics* (1913), it provided valuable support for the rising group of social scientists committed to the view that since political belief and action, and indeed human nature itself, were essentially irrational, decision-making had to be increasingly restricted to professional elites. We need another book that will place Lippmann in the gathering stream of anti-democratic theory and consider the democratic defense mounted explicitly against him by John Dewey's *The Public and Its Problems* and other authors.

By discounting the significance of Lippmann's ideas, Steel ironically seconds Lippmann's own early judgment of

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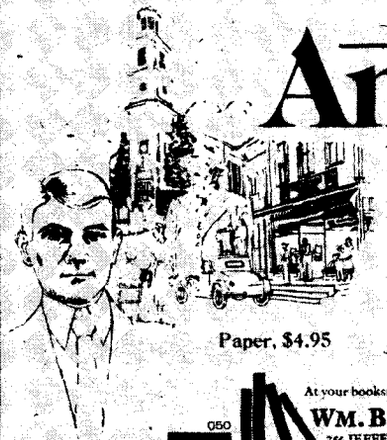

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their worth. "I don't love any idea sufficiently to worry ten minutes if someone compelled me to abandon it," he wrote Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. in 1915. That might be construed as intellectual humility—except that throughout his career Lippmann renounced one idea after another, even one book after another, with no explanation, no intellectual defense. If "philosophies . . . are the very soul of the philosopher projected," if "the man's philosophy is his autobiography"—as Lippmann wrote in a passage that Steel places at the start of the book—then Lippmann was the consummate opportunist, tailoring his convictions to suit the times. But Steel rightly judges him in the end not just by his philosophy, but by his actions, which frequently rose above opportunism. In the late forties he registered a strong dissent from the Cold War consensus, and in the sixties he became one of the earliest and most persuasive critics of Johnson's war. LBJ summoned up in him the kind of invective to which he had rarely resorted since his youth. The president, he wrote in 1966, was suffering from a "Messianic megalomania," struggling to "kill mosquitoes with tanks and build a Great Society with B-52s." After a lifetime of striving to be an insider, Lippmann embraced the role of outsider with consuming passion. It was a role to which, with his remarkable critical and journalistic abilities, he was well suited.

Angst & despair, bagels & lox

SIDE EFFECTS

Woody Allen

Random House, $8.95, 149 pp.

Sanford Pinsker

Side Effects, Woody Allen's third collection of comic writing, is preoccupied with the fate of modern man, that endangered species Allen defines as "any person born after Nietzsche's edict that 'God is dead,' but before the hit recording 'I Wanna Hold Your Hand'." The sixteen sketches—which rake over the usual Allen coals of love and death, angst and despair, bagels and lox—appeared originally in magazines like *The New Yorker, The New Republic* and the reincarnated *Kenyon Review*. Those who catch up on the latest news in *Rolling Stone* or *Crawdaddy* or who think that "Saturday Night Live" is sooooo funny will have a tough time with *Side Effects*. Without a cursory understanding of French existentialists like Sartre and Camus, what is one to make of the following:

> Now Cloquet stepped closer to Brisseau's sleeping hulk and again cocked the pistol. A feeling of nausea swept over him as he contemplated the implications of his action. This was an existential nausea, caused by his intense awareness of the contingency of life, and could not be relieved with an ordinary Alka-Seltzer. What was required was an Existential Alka-Seltzer—a product sold in many Left Bank drugstores. It was an enormous pill, the size of an automobile hubcap, that, dissolved in water, took away the queasy feeling induced by too much

Later the great would seek him out. At twenty-four he sought them out. In his quiet way he was an exceedingly ambitious young man who used his intelligence and charm to cultivate older men: Learned Hand and Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.—later Colonel House and Newton Baker. He challenged them, as he had Steffens, and provided them with an engaging, even idealized, version of their younger selves. In the talented young essayist—intense, precocious, a bit shy—they found a disciple worthy of their own estimate of themselves. —Ronald Steel
Walter Lippmann and the American Century

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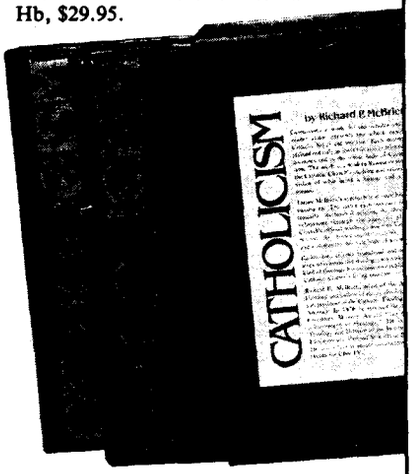

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awareness of life. Cloquet had also found it helpful after eating Mexican food.

I have quoted Woody Allen at length, partly because readers expect it (nothing could be deadlier or more disappointing than an Allen review *sans* Allen), and partly because I want to focus on those elements which distinguish his work from the current competition. Granted, much of the humor in *Side Effects* has a familiar ring. Allen's imagination works best in that special realm where the High Brow idea and the urban (read: Jewish) detail are forced to share space, often on opposing sides of a semi-colon. In "Remembering Needleman," for example, we are told that Sandor Needleman "differentiated between existence and Existence, and knew that one was preferable, but could never remember which . . . 'God is silent,' he was fond of saying, 'now if we can only get Man to shut up.'" Or in "The Lunatic's Tale," we are encouraged to shower "an appropriate hostility toward all deserving targets: politicians, television, facelifts, the architecture of housing projects, men in leisure suits, film courses, and people who begin sentences with 'basically'."

That much said, however, let me now suggest that Woody Allen's comic writing differs from his previous work as a stand-up comedian and from his ongoing career as a filmmaker, however much the same preoccupations persist. The discipline comic writing requires makes one literary, bookish, part of a Tradition that includes the likes of Robert Benchley, George Ade, James Thurber, E. B. White and S. J. Perelman. It is no coincidence that most of these comic giants are associated with *The New Yorker* magazine, nor is it surprising that Allen would want to count himself in their number. What looks for all the world like a stream-of-very-funny-consciousness is, in fact, the product of hard work and a half-dozen drafts. But to twist a phrase made famous by Harold Ross, *The New Yorker*'s founder: Woody Allen does not write for the pimply teenager from Dubuque. His congenial turf is not restricted to what passes for our popular culture and this, more than anything else, separates his humor from the trendy, and shallower, highjinks of "Saturday Night Live" or stand-up comics like Steve Martin and David Brenner.

Put another way: one of the more pleasant "side effects" of modernist culture is Woody Allen's humor. His sketches are a way of gauging what happens when the solemn manifestoes of Kierkegaard or Heidegger or Kafka become the stuff of college courses. As he tells us poignantly in "My Speech to the Graduates":

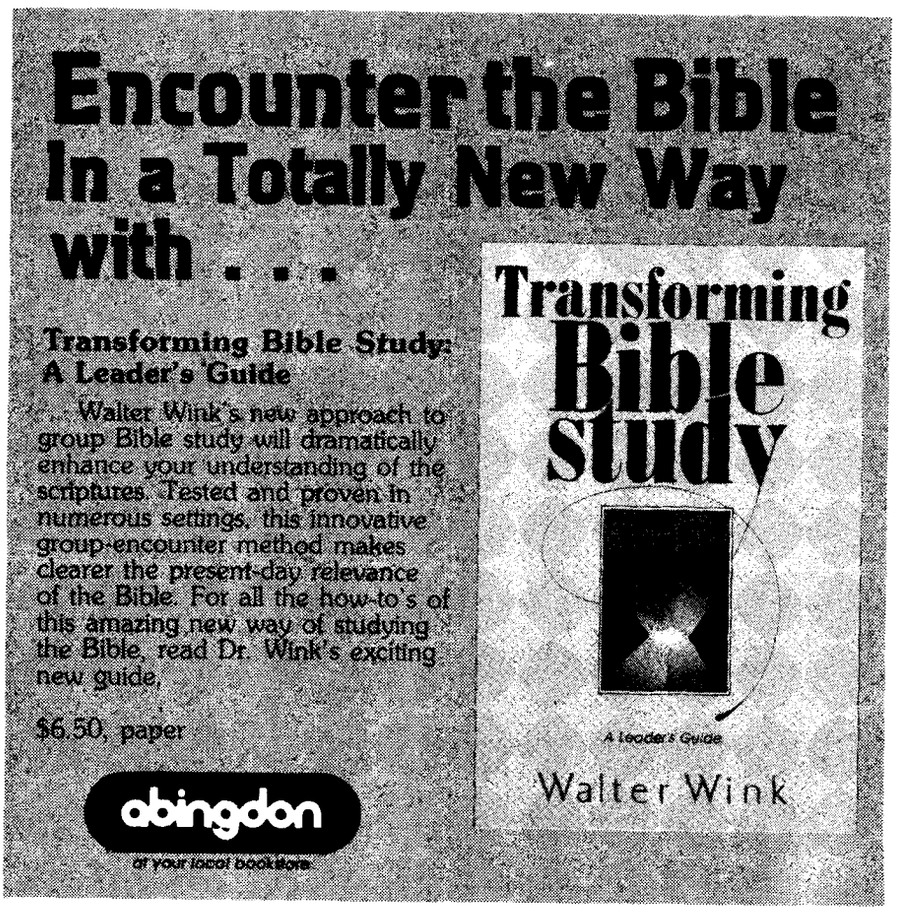
> Religion too has unfortunately let us down. Miguel de Unamuno writes blithely of the "eternal persistence of consciousness," but this is no easy feat. Particularly when reading Thackeray . . . Contemporary man, of course, has no such peace of mind. He finds himself in the midst of a crisis of faith. He is what we fashionably call "alienated." He has seen the ravages of war, he has known natural catastrophes, he has been to singles bars.

The dilemma, of course, is that modernist ideas have been debased and contemporary "ideas" are vacuous. Choose the former and you run the risk of sounding pretentious; opt for the latter and you are reduced to saying "you know" far more than is good for any of us. The result is a neurotic stand-off, one that, for Woody Allen, is likely to produce more collections of humor and more films than it is solutions.

Meanwhile, Allen adds his comic asides to our century's stockpile of images for ontological frustration. Consider the following from "By Destiny Denied":

> Pinchuck is a nervous man who fishes in his spare time but has not caught anything since 1923. "I guess it's not in the cards," he chortles. But when an acquaintance pointed out that he was casting his line into a jar of sweet cream he grew uneasy.

Granted, there are lesser moments in *Side Effects*; not every non sequitur manages to avoid the sophomore slump. For example, in a parody of the Socratic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dialogues one character can't quite resist pointing out that Isosoles "has a great idea for a new triangle." One wishes that he would have, because discretion is at least as much a part of humor as it is of valor. But small reservations aside, the general level of *Side Effects* makes it painfully clear that Woody Allen has no serious competition as our generation's most sophisticated, most significant humorist.

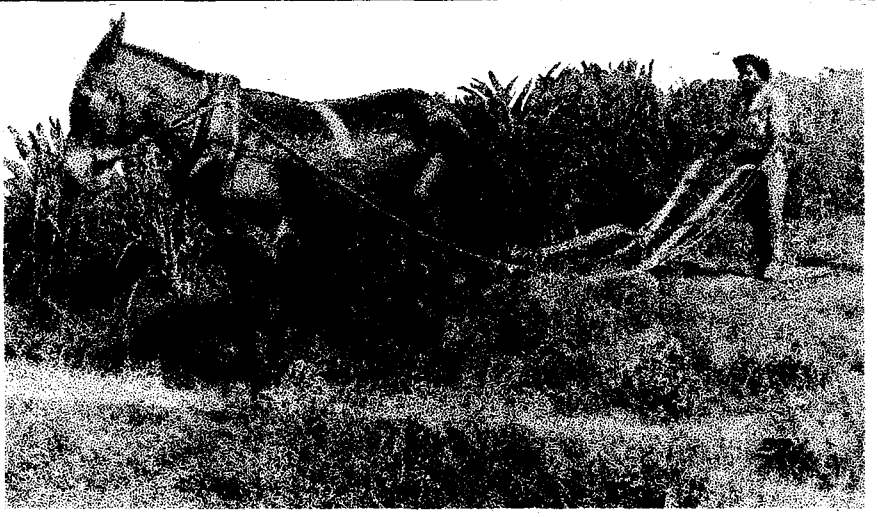
And in "The Kugelmass Episode," he has written a comic fantasy that is a worthy successor to James Thurber's "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty." Sidney Kugelmass is a professor of humanities at City College and a man desperate to have an extramarital affair. As he wails to his psychiatrist: "I need softness, I need flirtation . . . before it's too late I want to love in Venice, trade quips at '21,' and exchange coy glances over red wine and candlelight." He suffers, in short, from that great leveler of the contemporary man: mid-life crisis. Help comes in the form of a broken-down magician named Persky who, for $20 a trip, can transport Kugelmass (via a cheap-looking Chinese cabinet and some hocus-pocus) into any novel of his choice. Kugelmass is skeptical, but he finally settles on *Madame Bovary*.

The rest, as they say, is Kugelmass's fantasy come all too true. He meets Emma (who speaks "in the same fine English translation as the paperback") and they soon fall passionately in love. There is, however, a catch:

> What he didn't realize was that at this very moment students in various classrooms across the country were saying to their teachers, "Who is this character on page 100? A bald Jew is kissing Madame Bovary?" A teacher in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, sighed and thought, Jesus, these kids, with their pot and acid. What goes through their minds!

To give away more of the plot would be unfair, but suffice to say the story reveals as much about our cultural moment as Thurber's tale did about his. There is a sense in which Kugelmass is an avatar of Woody Allen, but also a deeper, scarier sense in which he is us. And that last dimension is what makes *Side Effects* a document of the zeitgeist as well as a very, very funny book.

> *No use, Cloquet reflected. I will have to meet my fate alone. There is no God. There is no purpose to life. Nothing lasts. Even the works of the great Shakespeare will disappear when the universe burns out—not such a terrible thought, of course, when it comes to a play like* Titus Andronicus, *but what about the others? No wonder some people commit suicide! Why not end this absurdity? Why go through with this hollow charade called life? Why, except that somewhere within us a voice says, "live." Always, from some inner region, we hear the command, "Keep living!" Cloquet recognized the voice; it was his insurance salesman. Naturally, he thought—Fishbein doesn't want to pay off.*
>
> —Woody Allen
> *Side Effects*



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National town meeting

AMERICAN DREAMS
LOST & FOUND

Studs Terkel

Pantheon, $14.95, 496 pp.

Richard Kuczkowski

STUDS TERKEL has been listening to America for years and he is not happy with the mood and posture that have become prominent among Americans during the last decade. "Forfeiting their own life experience, their own native intelligence, their personal pride, they allow more celebrated surrogates, whose imagination may be no larger than theirs, to think for them, to speak for them, to *be* for them in the name of the greater good. Conditioned toward being 'nobody,' they look toward 'somebody' for the answer."

Terkel's reaction is neither a dreary documentation of this state or a lugubriously enthusiastic search for its causes deep in the heart of the American character or system. Instead he has artfully fashioned oral history into a kind of town meeting where "a hundred American voices, captured by hunch, circumstance, and a rough idea" speak for and of themselves—a kind of antidote for present stultification.

There is the Austrian who came to America and became Mr. Universe; the Italian who became a Daley machine politician; the Pole who went to lectures at Hull House and heard Einstein speak on relativity; the young man from a rich family who went through expensive schools and drugs to find God among the Hare Krishnas; the logger who laments the rape of America's forests; the corporate "hired gun" who worked effectively for the success of his employers and was himself shot down; the man who publishes *Soldier of Fortune*, a magazine for mercenaries . . .

As usual, Terkel's people cannot adequately be summarized; their words must be read, their experiences pondered and compared. The voices reverberate like *Spoon River* or the poems of Whitman or Sandburg. But Terkel hasn't sought to turn reality into poetry or collect a gallery of self-portraits that feature mere variousness and typicality. America's aspirations, a persistent background theme in *Division Street, Hard Times, Working*, and even in Terkel's autobiography, *Talking to Myself*, are the central issue here, and apart from a few yea-sayers (a D.A.R. president and a casualty of a corporate power-play among them), the speakers are sharply and aptly critical of our performance. Racism against Indians, blacks, Nisei, Chicanos; greedy exploitation of resources; disregard for rights and the feelings of workers; destruction of human-scale life, neighborhoods—Terkel's voices pin each failure down to harsh, lived specifics.

But failure is not the final word. A feminist Miss U.S.A. used her "office" to speak out against our industrial and consumerist piggishness and called for Nixon's resignation. A Chicano woman who grew up as a migrant worker "learned English to fight back." She became an organizer with Cesar Chavez, later joined with five other families to buy forty acres of marginal land and

REVIEWERS

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build a farm for themselves, and is still active in National Land for People. The composer of "Which Side Are You On?" was "an uneducated Appalachian woman who became the poetic voice of her community." The publishers of a Kentucky newspaper fight for freedom of the press and the rights of people in a strip mining region, often against the opposition of the people they are fighting for. The poor white who found illusory self-respect in the Klan till he discovered that racism was used to exploit both poor whites and blacks slowly overcame his prejudices and now works tirelessly for the labor movement and equal opportunity.

These and similar voices ring through the book and compose its dominant key. If they stir up memories of Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*, Dos Passos's *U.S.A.*, even at times of Frank Capra's films, and make connections to a past spirit of grass-roots political and social activism in evil times, they also reveal that spirit alive today in an astonishing number and variety of embodiments. To Terkel, they represent a recognition of human possibility and an immense "capacity for change." The "non-celebrated people who bespeak the dreams of their fellows"—not childish fantasies of wealth without work, power without restraint, individualism without responsibility, and ease without effort, but immigrant dreams, populist and socialist dreams, the aspirations that fired the early labor and civil rights movements—the people who speak and organize for these dreams herald the resurgence of "a long-buried American tradition" of outspoken criticism and active common sense from the common man. They are the bedrock of Terkel's belief in what Herbert Muller has called "the genuine idealism of democracy, of the long and painful struggle for liberty and equality." *American Dreams* is Terkel's demonstration that that idealism is alive.

Such positive faith amid encircling gloom is rare today; still rarer the ability to reveal simply, convincingly, and unrhetorically both the gloom and the faith. Terkel knows where to find America; all his books, perhaps especially this last, help us to find ourselves, to remember and to recognize dreams worth recognizing.

In Brief

BIRDS OF WINTER, *by Theodore Vrettos, Houghton Mifflin, $9.95, 211 pp.*

The little Greek village of Livani belongs to "a wretched land that could nourish only the humble olive tree, the emaciated goat, a place where nothing survived but the spirit of a decaying past." One fragment of that spirit animates Jason, the young hero of Theodore Vrettos's *Bildungsroman*: the idea of the self as Icarus, able to soar above and away from the labyrinth that Livani has become for him. "I want to fly over that mountain," Jason thinks. "I want to look down at the world from the highest throne of the universe." Thus might he escape the embarrassments, primitive and parochial, of a village most of whose male inhabitants go to church only on Easter, and then only to fire pistols into the ceilings to make sure Christ awakens; a village where a bride's relatives invade her honeymoon cottage on her wedding night, to look on her wedding sheets for traces of hymenic blood.

Jason would go to Athens and he would go to America, but the twentieth century has other plans for him. It is 1940, and after the fascists invade Greece, Jason and his fellow reservists are dispatched to a front in Albania, where he is wounded. He returns to Greece, neither to Livani nor to Athens but to a religious community on a nearly inaccessible mountain top, the Monastery of the Living Blood, where Jason hopes to find freedom and, if not God, himself. He finds, instead, monks whose idea of freedom is a fixation on death, because life, one of them explains, "is the soul confined in the tomb of the body. The only way it can be liberated is through death." This notion Jason rejects; but what is puzzling in this generally absorbing novel is why Jason ever expected the monastic life to resolve his problems of young manhood. He is a character of a certain complexity, but in his make-up I do not see impulses of

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spiritual yearning; even the recurrent image of flight equals a desire for escape, not transcendence. Athens might not have fulfilled his quest either, but as an objective it makes sense; the monastery doesn't. At the end Jason returns to Livani, and what he finds there, though perhaps crueler still, reminds us of the brevity of Icarus's freedom, and the absoluteness of his loss.

MARK TAYLOR

Correspondence

(Continued from page 610)

"unemployment-creating" minimum wage laws. This is coupled with a theme common to conservatives old and new: denial that a laissez-faire, free market economy is subject to any serious tendencies toward instability.

Cyclical swings indeed are inherent in capitalist economies, and they make economic forecasting hazardous. This is why, despite what Charles Todd [Sept. 26] seems to think, in no place do I defend "the less-than-remarkable track record achieved by economics and economists." Neither Keynesian income-expenditure analysis nor Chicagoite monetarism possesses the key to understanding where we are heading, though Keynesianism at least recognizes that a free market economy is not a self-regulating mechanism which, if only left alone by "government," tends to produce full employment and price stability. Todd's main point is that "individual decisions, each of narrower scope and lesser impact than the corresponding government policy action, [have] less potential for a net harmful effect." This is an assertion; it has no empirical basis. Moreover, it rests on the "fallacy of composition," that what is true of one part must necessarily be true of the whole. On the contrary, actions which may be rational for an individual firm or household may, in the aggregate, produce socially unacceptable results. A single business firm must lay off workers during a recession to survive; when 200,000 firms all do it, national unemployment surges. The profit-maximizing of individual corporations is the very embodiment of micro-rationality, but it creates macro-irrationality on an enormous scale. Todd's apparent answer, that conservative philosophy links "decentralized decision-making" to "individual accountability for one's actions," represents wishful thinking. I need only mention Love Canal, the Ford Pinto, the poisoning of the Hudson and James Rivers—and the social dislocations generated by the automobile-highway-petroleum complex over the past three decades. The inevitable conservative response is either that government is at fault, or else consumers, not producers, are responsible. "They create, as it were, a demand for pollution" when they use electricity, Friedman tells us in another example of the "consumer sovereignty" explanation for the "negative spillover" effects of economic growth.

Everyone should heed conservative warnings about concentrated power—public as well as private. But Sowell's grand phrases about "issues of economic efficiency and (more important) human freedom" are, by now, familiar code words for blasting away at the sins of government and ignoring the power and effects of monopoly capital.

RICHARD B. DuBOFF
Bryn Mawr College

A priceless legacy

Bethlehem Pa.

To the Editors: I move Professor L. A. O'Donnell's article [Sept. 12] be spread in the minutes and read at every American trade union meeting and in every classroom. Rediscovering and revisiting our sadly neglected labor history is on America's agenda. It sure as hell is an emotionally appealing, intellectually rewarding experience. Moreover, an act of reparation to heroes, heroines, the great, the near great; those ordinary workers in pursuit of the extraordinary. Their struggles for democracy at America's workplace, industrial (economic) democracy, and *free trade unions*, are a priceless legacy. Obviously, too, a currently attractive American export coveted in the family of nonpossessing nations. . . .

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